Carsten Hansen

The Sicilian Dragon

move by move

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About the Author

Carsten Hansen is a FIDE Master from Denmark. He has written numerous books on chess, particularly focusing on the opening, and his writing is renowned for its thoroughness and attention to detail. From 1999 to 2014, he was a columnist for the popular website Chesscafe.com, where he primarily reviewed opening chess books.
This is his first book for Everyman Chess.

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Introduction

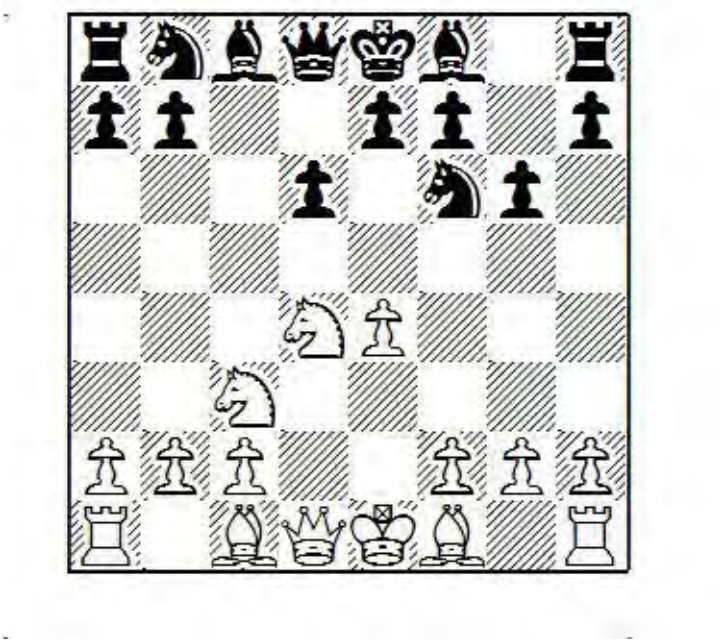
Let me take you on a little journey. We are going back to 1984. I had started playing the Sicilian Defence, in particular the Accelerated Dragon, with a particular line in mind: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 Qa5, where I got quite a bit of mileage out of tricks like 8 Qd2 Nxe4! and 8 f3 Qb4 9 Bb3 Nxe4!, winning material and often the game without much of a battle.

However, as I rose in rating, my opposition got stronger. Most of them either played 8 0-0 (after which ... Qb4 shenanigans would not work) or entered the Maroczy Bind with 5 c4, which I found dreadfully boring for Black. In any case, my early days with the Accelerated Dragon were soon numbered and I started using different openings.

Then we skip to 1986 when I had just reached the rank of master player (Danish rating 1900) at the age of 14 (the youngest at the time, until my friend Peter Heine Nielsen later that year reached the same milestone at the age of 12), and I felt ready to conquer a broader variety of openings.

At my parents' coffee table, I spent a great number of mornings in my school summer vacation on studying the Sicilian Defence from the *New In Chess* Keybooks (a two-volume set, covering all openings). I played through every single game and variation on the Sicilian, and felt I learned an awful lot, with the notion that nobody would be able to surprise me. I was, of course, entirely wrong. In the very first tournament (a rapid event), I ended up playing four Sicilians as Black, the Scheveningen, the Najdorf, the Sveshnikov and the Dragon. I lost all of them quickly. Several of the beatings were short and brutal. My experienced opponents knew the sub-variations far better than I did and punished me accordingly. That led to some introspection, mainly inspired by my dad who suggested that I should pick a few lines that I liked the best and then really work to understand them. The Sveshnikov and the Dragon ended up as my choices. I played both variations regularly for the next six months before I decided on settling for just the Dragon.

The Dragon Variation is usually arrived at from the following move order, **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6**



It became my primary weapon as Black for several years and has always remained a reliable back-up even after I started using other openings to broaden my understanding and inject a bit of unpredictability

into my opening repertoire. In the Dragon, I was locked and loaded to a greater degree than in any opening. I recall the time when I had just finished a game and was analysing it with my opponent when a mutual friend stopped by to see what we were figuring out. He then asked my opponent, "Why did you let Carsten play the Dragon? Were you trying to lose on purpose?" While by no means a guaranteed win, it provided a degree of security that allowed me to think that I had every chance of winning the game no matter which opposition I faced.

Of course, that belief was rocked from time to time, but I have certainly enjoyed many interesting battles with the Dragon as well studying and analysing it with friends over the years.

The material in this book has been split up in three parts:

1. Non-Yugoslav Attack
2. Yugoslav Attack without Bc4
3. Yugoslav Attack with Bc4

The first section covers the Classical lines involving 6 Be2 as well as other 'minor' lines. These are generally not considered particularly critical, but are important for the understanding of the opening. I could have easily spent more time and pages on several of the variations that fall into this section, but decided against it for practical reasons.

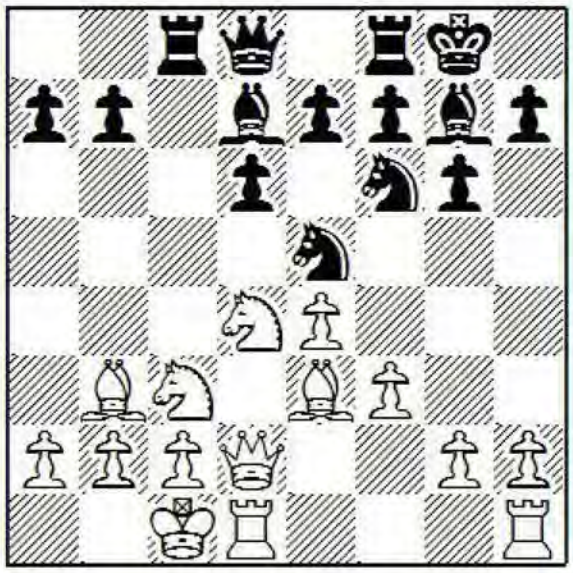
The second section deals with two variations, after **6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0** and now Black essays either **9 0-0-0** and **9 g4**.

In particular, the former, 9 0-0-0, has become a major weapon against the Dragon because it lets White set the tone for the game to come, in a manner which is very different from the main lines in the third section. The latter, 9 g4, is a positional option which has never been really popular, although it has had its peaks. Even today, it remains a viable option if White wants to play somewhat sharp, but is unwilling to enter the madness which we will look at in the third section.

There, in the final section, we are examining an abundance of variations that are very different from one another. Although some characteristics are repeated from line to line, the overall game plans vary tremendously. To enter them as White require excellent preparation and some degree of bravery, because if your opponent switches to a different line from the one(s) you prepared, then you can easily end up in severe trouble, trying to make your way through a labyrinth of established and complex lines that look similar, but where individual move orders and other finesses can decide a game rapidly.

After **9 Bc4**, there are already the first couple of alternatives for Black, such as **9 ... Nd7, 9 ... Nxd4, 9 ... a5** and ultimately, we will then examine the main lines with **9 ... Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5** (see diagram below).

Rather than just presenting a repertoire for Black, I have tried to cover the main line as objectively as possible, and analysed all the variations I consider important. The intention was never to discuss all minor lines in excruciating detail so connoisseurs will undoubtedly be able to point to lines and sub-variations that I have missed out in my selection process. While this book is not intended to be the final word and verdict on the Dragon Variation, I have put a great deal of effort into analysing the games as well as go over the existing theory from books, databases and online sources. If I have misquoted some of my sources, I apologise and the same goes for overlooking if an idea has not been attributed to somebody who mentioned it prior to this work. However, I do feel that I have added a hefty chunk of new ideas and original analysis, in many cases overturning current evaluations and preferences. This of course in part comes from working with a strong engine on a fast computer, but in many cases, also from vast experience with the opening, because I do not always agree with the assessments provided by the engine I had worked with.



The Dragon Variation is a fun opening to study and play. Getting to know it well can seem like a daunting task, but as you work your way through the book, you will soon get a feel for the lines which appeal to you more than others. Stick with that feeling and put some additional effort into studying those particular lines and it will surely pay off.

I have played many, but not all, of the lines covered in this book. Some lines were considered highly suspect and some were only developed later than my Dragon-playing prime. As you will see, there is room for a lot of independent explorations in both the major and minor lines, allowing you to choose between lines that have been studied very deeply and lines where the development still only scratches the surface.

I wish great success with the Dragon Variation, both as Black and White and hope you will enjoy the battles as much as I have and enjoy reading this book as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost a big thank you to Stephanie Alexander, who has dealt with the long hours it took for this book to take shape. You have endured many solitary evenings while I typed and clicked away in the office. Your patience and understanding have been tested beyond measure.

Also, I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues at my day job in the shipping industry. They inspire me, on a daily basis, to test the boundaries for what I think is possible for me to accomplish.

A special thanks to John Emms and Byron Jacobs who have pushed and supported me throughout this process, despite the project getting considerably bigger and more time-consuming than any of us had initially envisaged.

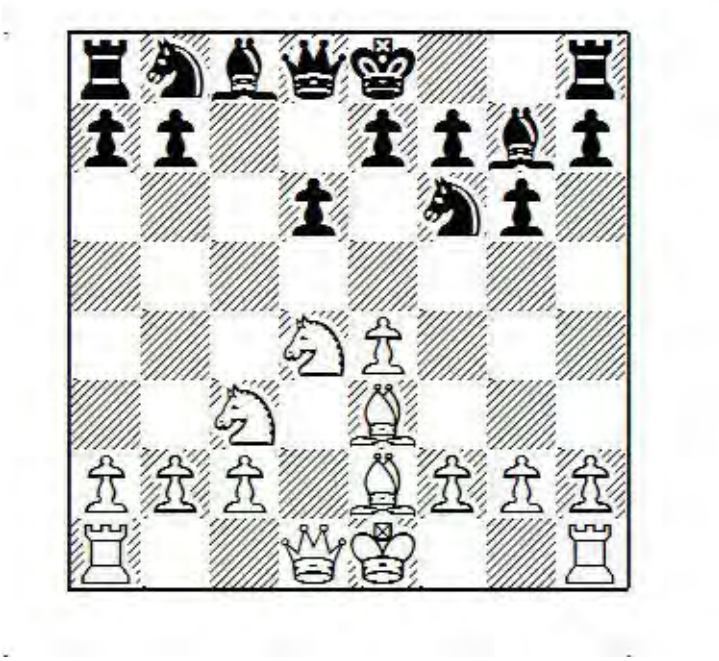
Finally, a tip of the hat to John ‘Johnny Mags’ Sigona, who had for years asked me when I would write a book on the Sicilian Dragon. Well, now it finally happened.

Carsten Hansen
Bayonne, New Jersey
July 2016

Chapter One
Classical Dragon: Early Deviations

In this chapter, we will look at how White can deviate from the main line Classical Dragon (6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nb3 0-0) which we will cover in Chapter Two.

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 Be3

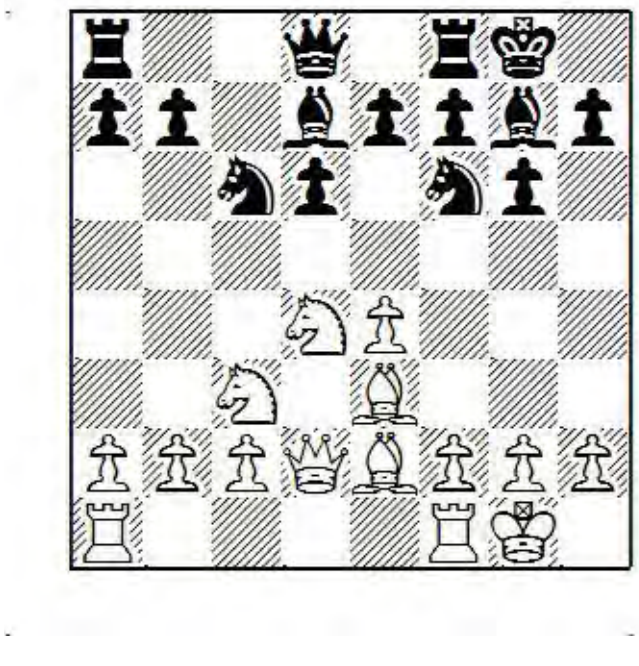


If you think that we are starting out soft by discussing the early deviations of the Classical Dragon, then you are somewhat (but not entirely) wrong. The Classical Variation is not Black's biggest problem in the Dragon, but early deviations may include some tricky lines that have been employed repeatedly by some of the strongest players in the world. Some are in my opinion entirely harmless but others require very specific, concrete knowledge especially if Black intends to play for more than just a draw.

In Games 1 and 2, White opens with 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 Be3 0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 and now plays the centralising 9 Qd2, a Kamsky favourite. In Game 1, besides examining the stem game move 9 ... Bd7, the typical Sicilian central blow 9 ... d5 is also examined in the notes. In Game 2, we scrutinise the knight sally 9 ... Ng4 which earns the bishop pair at the cost of speeding up White's initiative. In Game 3, via a Levenfish attack transposition, we look at 9 f4, a move which is considered harmless for Black but this is only if Black knows what he is doing. The theme of whether Black should play 9 ... d5 or not continues in the following main games where White chooses relatively modest set-ups with 9 h3 (Game 4) and 9 Kh1 (Game 5), both of which invite Black to consider the central push. However, White's set-up in Game 6 is one of the sharpest continuations for White in the Classical Dragon when after 8 f4 Nc6 9 Nb3 Be6, White lunges 10 g4, commencing the Alekhine Attack. In the final game of the chapter, we see Shirov as White combine the Classical Dragon with the Yugoslav Attack with 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0.

Game 1
L.Dominguez Perez–D.Smerdon
Khanty-Mansiysk 2009

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 Be2 0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Qd2 Bd7



Question: The text move looks rather insipid, doesn't it? Shouldn't the standard Sicilian freeing move 9 ... d5 be preferred here?

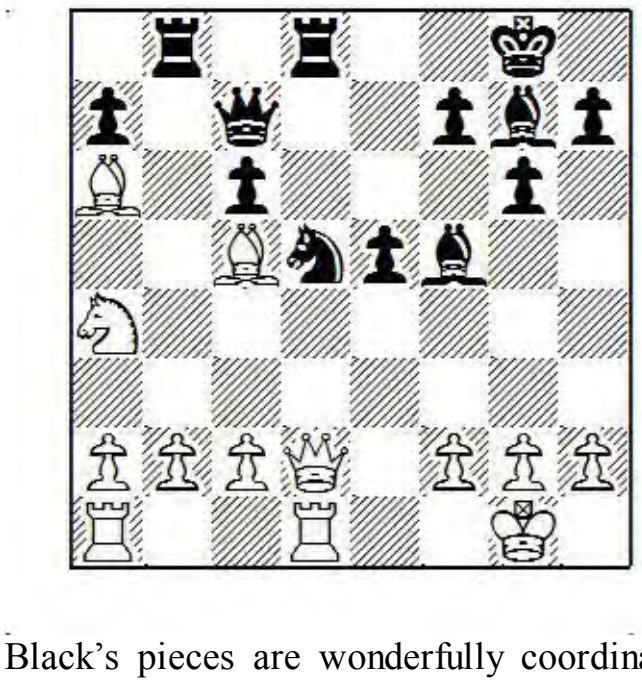
Answer: While 9 ... d5 certainly is a possibility that Black should always keep his eyes open for, in the Classical Dragon, there's always the risk that massive simplifications will follow as a result of central exchanges and a stale game might result. This may not be in Black's interest if he is playing for a win.

a) After 9 ... d5, White usually trades the central pawns or keeps the central tension:

a1) 10 exd5 is largely harmless as after 10 ... Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 and now, White typically decides between two central rook placements:

a11) 12 Rad1 doesn't change anything in terms of creating more problems for Black, for example, 12 ... Qc7 13 Nxd5 cxd5 14 Qxd5 Be6 15 Qc5 Qxc5 16 Bxc5 Bxb2 17 Bxe7 Rfe8 18 Bc5 Bxa2 19 Bf3 Rac8 20 Bxa7, and the players agreed to a draw, S.Vokarev-S.Azarov, St Petersburg 2009. This variation fully illustrates the point I have just made above.

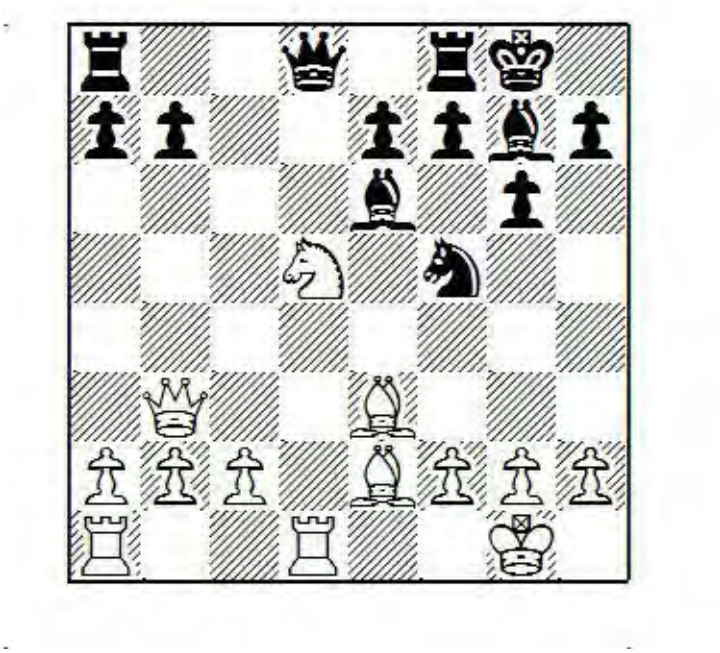
a12) 12 Rfd1 Qc7 13 Bd4?! is very ambitious as White tries to prove that Black's structural pawn weaknesses are more pertinent than his piece activity, but that is hardly the case. Following 13 ... e5 14 Bc5 Rd8 15 Na4 Bf5 16 Ba6 Rab8,



Black's pieces are wonderfully coordinated, whereas the same can hardly be said about White's pieces, which has been set up to exploit Black's perceived weaknesses on the queenside. After 17 c4?,

White's position collapses rapidly (the lesser evil, though quite unattractive is 17 Bf1 e4 18 Qe1 e3 with clearly better chances for Black, whose pieces are all on active squares). Black unleashed 17 ... Nb4! and White cannot prevent material losses. This reminds us of Nunn's rule – *Loose Pieces Drop Off*. White, a 2500+ rated GM, was routed after 18 Qxd8+ Rxd8 19 Rxd8+ Qxd8 20 Bxb4 Bc2 21 b3 e4 22 Re1 Bd4, and facing insurmountable threats, he decided to call it a day in A.Rizouk-G.Jones, Plovdiv 2012.

a2) 10 Rfd1 Nxd4 (for obvious reasons, Black should avoid 10 ... dxe4?? 11 Nxc6 Qxd2 12 Nxe7+ dropping a piece) 11 Qxd4 Nxe4 12 Qxd5 Nd6 seems as if White has some initiative, but Black's remaining undeveloped pieces will soon come to life. For example, 13 Qb3 (13 Bd4 Be6 14 Qc5 b6 15 Qg5 Rc8 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qe5+ Kg8 18 Rd2 Rc5 (18 ... Nc4 19 Rxd8 Nxe5 is fine for Black as well) 19 Qf4 Qc7 20 Rad1 and the players agreed, somewhat prematurely to a draw, B.Heberla-S.Tiviakov, Baden-Baden 2011) 13 ... Be6 14 Nd5 Nf5!



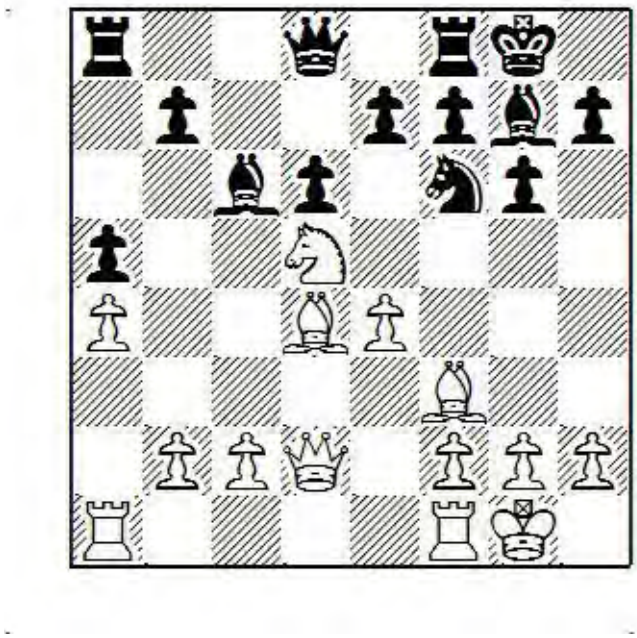
A strong move requiring accurate calculation, but thus far, Black has proven to be in good shape:

a21) 15 c4 Nxe3 16 Qxe3 (winning the queen with 16 Nf6+?! does not faze Black as after 16 ... Bxf6 17 Rxd8 Raxd8 18 Qxe3 Bxb2, Black's rook, bishop and pawn easily counterbalanced the queen in E.Vasiukov-E.Gufeld, Tbilisi 1959) 16 ... Bxd5 17 Rxd5 Qb6 18 Qd2 and here a draw was agreed in M.Makropoulou-I.Gaponenko, Mardin 2011 though Black is actually better with the g7-bishop far stronger than its e2-counterpart.

a22) 15 Qxb7?! temporarily wins a pawn, but at the cost of some long-term issues. After 15 ... Rb8 16 Qxa7 Bxd5 17 c4 Rxb2 18 Rxd5 Qc8, Black has full compensation for the pawn and White may try to trade down to a slightly inferior endgame to save a draw.

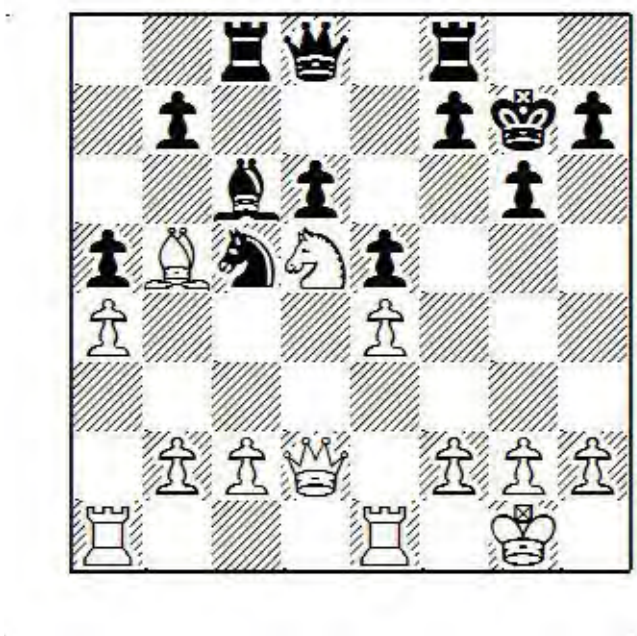
a23) 15 Bf3 Nxe3 16 Qxe3 Bxd5 17 Rxd5 Qc7 18 c3 b6 is even and an uneventful draw is very likely to be just around the corner, if you take recent grandmaster games such as A.Kovchan-G.Jones, Zalakaros 2014 as an indicator.

b) A decidedly less commonly seen idea, but worth some consideration (especially looking at who gave it a shot) is 9 ... Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Bd7 11 a4 Bc6 12 Bf3 a5 13 Nd5



Question: Should Black remove that pesky d5-knight which is exerting pressure on the f6-, e7- and b6-squares?

Answer: That is what White is hoping for in such situations. Black usually avoids the d5-exchange as long term pressure along the e-file will result after either 13 ... Bxd5 14 exd5 or 13 ... Nxd5 14 exd5. This is a fairly standard idea in the Dragon variation or for that matter, in the English opening with the colours reversed. After 13 ... Nd7 (covering the b6-square) 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Rfe1 Rc8 16 Be2 Nc5 17 Bb5 e5!?, chances are fairly even.



Black hands over control of the d5-square and saddles himself with the backward d6-pawn in order to unbalance the game and possibly seek the kingside initiative, G.Kamsky-M.Carlsen, Nice 2009.

10 Rfd1

At this juncture, White has tried several moves which do not trouble Black much. Nevertheless, let's take a quick tour through White's catalogue of ideas:

a) 10 Nb3 a5 11 a4 Nb4 12 f3 Bc6 13 Rfd1 Nd7 14 Bd4 Bxd4+ 15 Nxd4 Qb6 with even chances, M.Ly-Li Chao, Parramatta 2010.

b) 10 f4 Nxd4 (or 10 ... a6 11 Nb3 b5 12 a3 Rc8 13 Bf3 Bg4 14 Qe2 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nd7 16 e5?! dxe5 17 Rad1 exf4 18 Bxf4 Nce5 19 Qg3 Nc4 and White is already in serious trouble, M.Illescas Cordoba-L.Ljubojevic, Bilbao 1987) 11 Bxd4 Bc6 12 Qe3 Qa5 13 e5 dxe5 14 Bxe5 e6 15 Rfd1 Rfc8 16 a3 Nd7

17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Rd2 Qb6 19 Qxb6 Nxb6 20 Kf2 h6 with no problems for Black, A.Mikhalchishin-Z.Kozul, Maribor 2000.

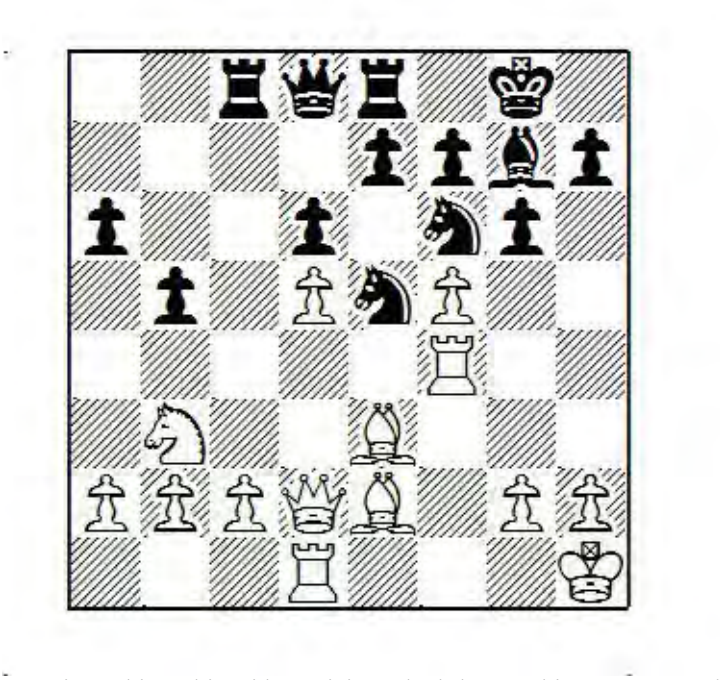
c) 10 Rad1, and here Black has tried:

c1) 10 ... Rc8 and now:

c11) The solid 11 h3 doesn't rock Black's boat too much and Black simply continues with queenside expansion with11 ... a6 12 a3 b5 13 Rfe1 Qc7 14 Bf1 Qb7 15 f3 Rfe8 16 Nxc6 Bxc6 17 Nd5 Nd7 18 c3 Ne5 19 Qf2, B.Heberla-R.Mamedov, Plovdiv 2012, and here Black equalises with 19 ... Bxd5 20 exd5 Nc4 21 Bxc4 bxc4.

c12) 11 f4 a6 12 Nxc6 does not set Black any tactical problems here (the cautious 12 Kh1?! is also unnecessary as after 12 ... b5 13 Bf3 Qc7 14 Nb3 b4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 exd5 Na5, White is beginning to have real issues on the queenside, E.Geller-G.Serper, Moscow 1995) 12 ... Bxc6 13 Bf3 Qc7 14 Rf2 b5 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 Nd7 17 c3 Nb6 18 Be2 Nc4 19 Bxc4 Qxc4 20 a3 f5 21 Bb6 Rfe8 and the game was fairly even, though White's position looks a little easier to play, C.Dolezal-A.Hoffman, Buenos Aires 1998.

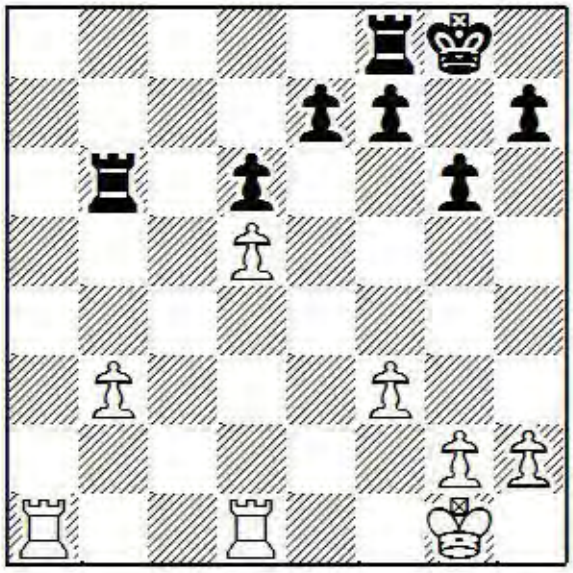
c2) 10 ... a6 11 Nb3 (11 f3 Rc8 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 Kh1 b5 14 Bd4 b4 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 a5 17 Ba6 Rb8 18 Rfe1 Qc7 19 b3 Rfe8 20 Rc1 Nd7 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 c4 bxc3 23 Rxc3, Ni Hua-T.Petrosian, Internet (blitz) 2006 is fine for Black and now 23 ... Qa7 24 Bc4 a4 leaves Black with a pleasant game) 11 ... b5 12 f3 Re8 13 Nd5 Be6 14 Kh1 Nd7 15 f4 Rc8 16 f5 Bxd5 17 exd5 Nce5 18 Rf4 Nf6 was P.Murdzia-L.Cyborowski, Warsaw 2003.



Despite White's kingside activity, Black has nothing to worry about. In fact, White subsequently gambled with 19 Rh4? and had to ditch a pawn for insufficient compensation after 19 ... Nc4! 20 Bxc4 bxc4 21 Nd4 Nxd5.

10 ... Rc8 11 f3 a6 12 a4 Ne5

Black can also consider 12 ... Na5 (with the idea of ... Nc4) 13 Nd5 Nxd5 14 exd5 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 b3 Rc8 17 Bh6 Bxh6 18 Qxh6 Rc5 19 c4 b5 (19 ... e5!?, seeking activity and opening up the position is equally good and after 20 dxe6 fxe6 21 Nc2 Rh5 22 Qd2 d5 23 Ne3 Bc6, chances are about even) 20 axb5 axb5 21 Nxb5 Bxb5 22 cxb5 Qb6 23 Qe3 Rxb5 24 Qxb6 Rxb6.



Although White hasn't lost any material, he is stuck with two pawn weaknesses in the double rook ending in comparison with Black's solid Dragon pawn structure, V.Jansa-M.Tazbir, Czech League 2011. In fact, White failed to hold the ending and succumbed in 59 moves.

13 Nd5

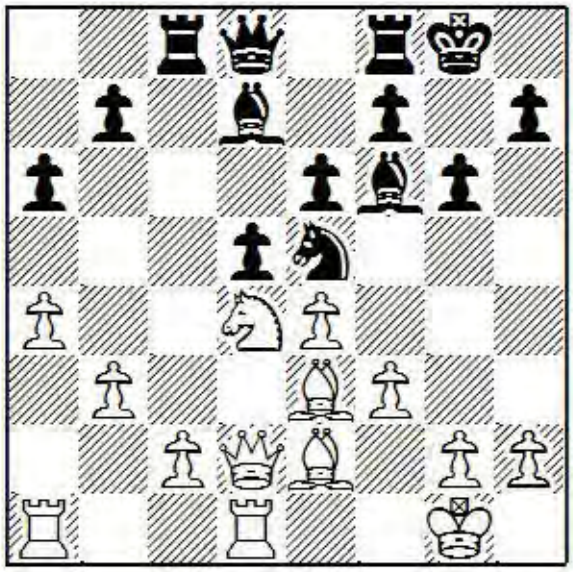
The Cuban grandmaster offers a knight trade to set up a queenside pawn majority. White has also attempted to fix Black's queenside pawns with 13 a5 though after 13 ... Qc7 14 Kh1 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Qxc4 16 Nde2 Qb4 17 Qc1 Qc4 18 Nf4, Black shouldn't be worried, G.Kamsky-V.Gashimov, Mainz 2010.

13 Kh1 is slow and lacks a general purpose though Black has to exercise care. For example, after an 'automatic move' such as 13 ... Nc4?! (13 ... Qa5 14 Nb3 Qc7 15 a5 Nc4 16 Bxc4 Qxc4 is perfectly comfortable for Black), White has 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 a5 Qc7 16 Nde2 Rc8 17 Bb6 Qb8 18 Rac1, emerging with more space and an easier game, J.Lopez Martinez-P.Negi, Dubai 2010.

13 ... e6

The knight trade 13 ... Nxd5 14 cxd5 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 is a transposition to 12 ... Na5 variation discussed in the notes to Black's 12th move.

14 Nxf6+ Bxf6 15 b3 d5?!



Exercise: Black's move attempts to develop active central counterplay. However, there is a flaw in this idea. What is it?

Answer: The problem for Black is that this ill-timed break allows White to establish close the centre in his favour after the next two moves.

The simple 15 ... Nc6 16 Rac1 d5 17 Nxc6 Bxc6 18 exd5 exd5 19 Bd4 Re8 leads to equal chances where neither side should expect to be able to generate serious chances of any kind.

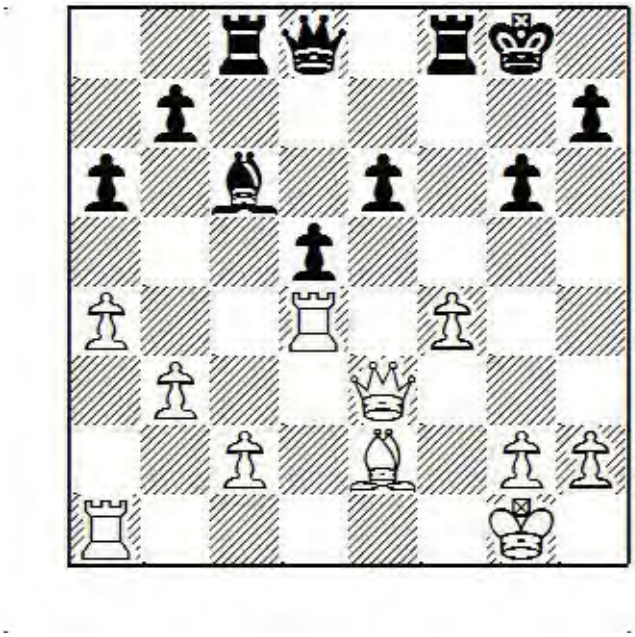
16 f4 Nc6 17 e5 Bg7

The game is beginning to take shape along the lines of a Classical French.

18 Nxc6 Bxc6 19 Bd4

In anticipation of Black's pawn break with ... f7-f6, White readies his bishop to stop Black from developing any initiative in the centre.

19 ... f6 20 exf6 Bxf6 21 Qe3 Bxd4 22 Rxd4



Black's position is by no means lost, but it lacks potential. Thus, he is subjected to a dreary defensive task.

22 ... Qf6 23 Re1 Kg7

My computer gives preference to 23 ... b5 24 axb5 axb5 25 g3 Rfe8 26 Bf1, but here too the chances are solely on White's side. The weak dark squares and the dull c6-bishop leave Black with somewhat sombre long-term prospects.

24 Bd3 Rce8 25 g3 Kg8 26 Qe5 Qxe5 27 Rxe5

As mentioned before, Black is not lost, but all activity is controlled by White. Black will have to find a set-up that limits White's chances to successfully break open the position when it suits him. That, however, is easier said than done.

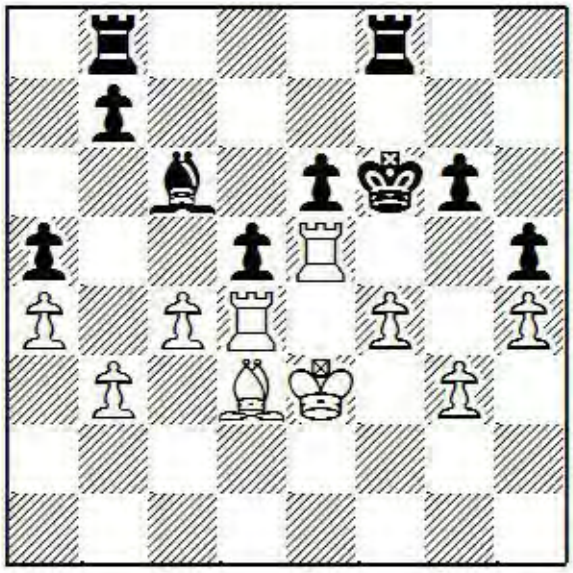
27 ... Kf7 28 h4 h5

I would be hesitant to let my pawns get fixed on the light squares in this fashion. Note that now only White can break open the kingside with g3-g4 (at an appropriate juncture).

29 Kf2 Kf6 30 Ke3 a5!? 31 c3 Rb8

Not a bad idea, attempting active counterplay with ... b7-b5, but obviously White isn't that accommodating.

32 c4!

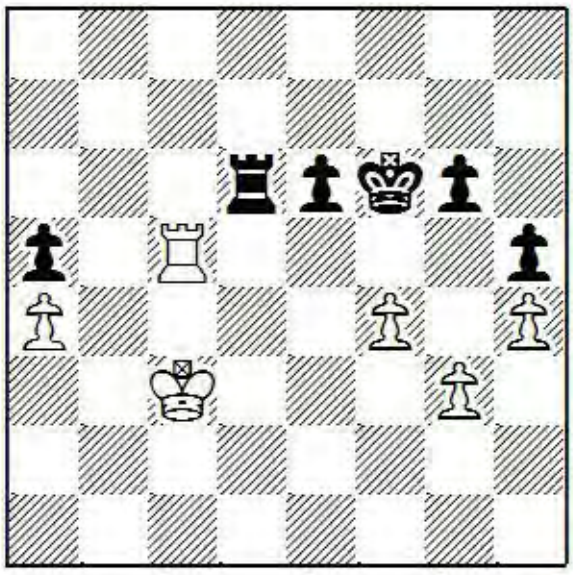


A well-timed hit, nipping Black's ... b7-b5 plan in the bud. Moreover, Black cannot trade pawns with 32 ... dxc4 Bxc4 as the e6-pawn will be irreversibly weakened.

32 ... b6 33 cxd5 Bxd5 34 Bc4

White doesn't really achieve anything after 34 b4 Rfd8 35 Rg5 Rg8 either.

34 ... Bxc4 35 bxc4 Rfd8 36 Rb5 Rxd4 37 Kxd4 Rd8+ 38 Kc3 Rd6 39 c5 bxc5 40 Rxc5



40 ... Rd1??

In the last move before the time control, Black blunders and loses. The only way to hold this endgame is through 40 ... Rd5!, which possibly required more calculation than Black had time for. After 41 Rxd5 (41 Kc4 Kf5 42 Rc6 Rd2 43 Rb6 (also, 43 Ra6 Rd5 holds) 43 ... Rd1 44 Rb5+ and once again, 44 ... Rd5! maintains the balance) 41 ... exd5 42 Kd4 Kf5 43 Kxd5 Kg4 44 Ke4 Kxg3 45 f5 gxf5+ 46 Kxf5 Kxh4 47 Kf4, a truce can be declared.

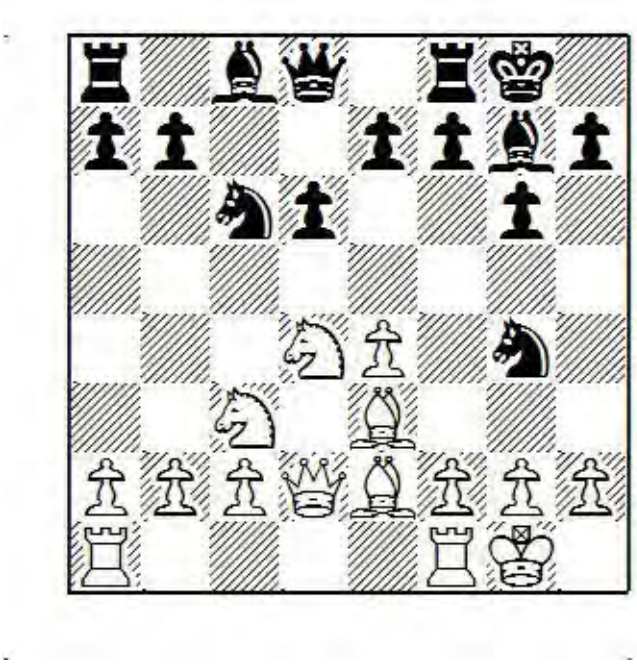
41 Rxa5 Ra1 42 Kb2 Rg1 43 Rg5

White keeps control of the kingside pawns with his rook while the king assists the a-pawn on its way to promotion.

43 ... Rg2+ 44 Kb3 Rg1 45 a5 Ra1 46 Kb4 Rb1+ 47 Kc5 Ke7 48 a6 1-0

Game 2
N.Short-A.Motylev
Wijk aan Zee 2009

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 Be2 0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Qd2 Ng4



Question: Why is this move not automatically Black's best move? He 'wins' a bishop and unleashes his Dragon bishop, doesn't he?

Answer: By normal conventions, yes this should be a good move. It is for a good reason that White usually plays f2-f3 or h2-h3 to prevent the knight sally. However, it does exchange the knight which is a dynamic piece that helps to put pressure on the white centre. Thus, the flipside of the subsequent piece trade is that Black will find that the traditional pawn break ... d6-d5 hard to achieve.

10 Bxg4 Bxg4 11 h3

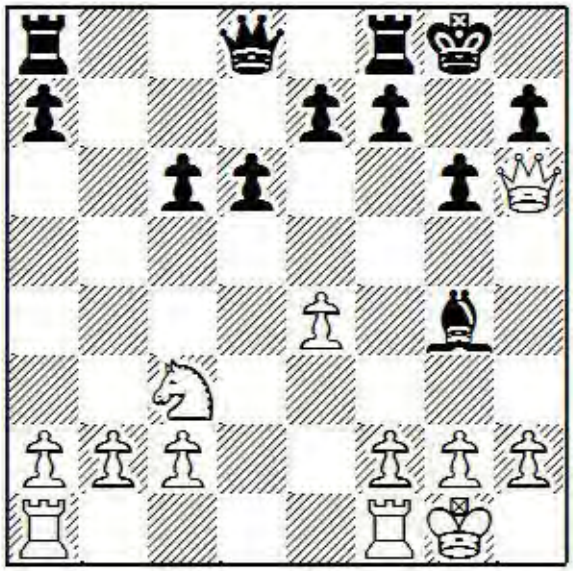
White chases the bishop back to a more passive position in order to regain control over the d1-square for the rook. White has also tried several other moves:

a) 11 Nd5, with the idea of c2-c4, aims to take the game into a Maroczy-style position:

a1) Now 11 ... Be6 12 c4 Qd7 13 a4 Bxd5 14 exd5 Nxd4 15 Bxd4 Bxd4 16 Qxd4 Rfe8 17 Rfe1 b6 18 h3 e5 19 dxe6 Rxe6 20 Rxe6 Qxe6 leaves White with an optical advantage at best, J.Timman-L.Ljubojevic, Bugojno 1986.

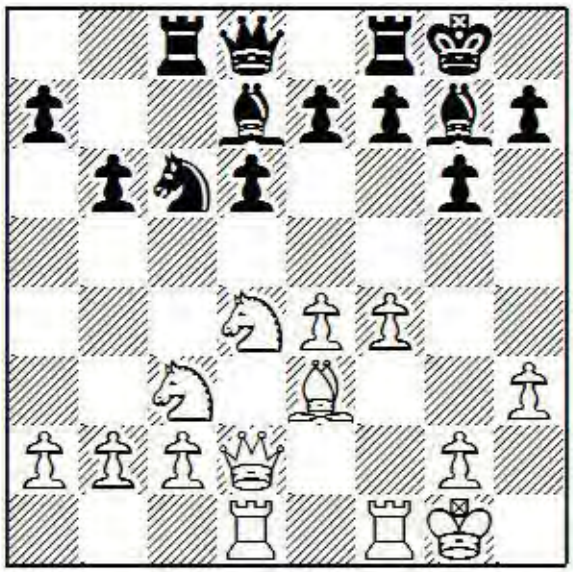
a2) 11 ... Bd7 12 c4 Ne5 (12 ... Rc8 13 b3 a6 14 Rac1 e6 15 Nc3 Qe7 16 Nde2 Ne5 17 Rfd1 Bc6 18 h3 is better for White, V.Sikula-R.Polzin, Austria 2009) 13 b3 e6 14 Nc3 Ng4 15 Bg5 Qa5 16 h3 Qe5 17 hxg4 Qxd4 18 Rac1 Qxd2 19 Bxd2 and Black has solved his opening problems.

b) A more common continuation is 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bh6 Bxh6 13 Qxh6, intending to prove that the knight is a better piece than the bishop.



Black has tried 13 ... Rb8 (also playable is 13 ... Qb6 14 Rab1 Be6 15 Rfd1 Rab8 16 Rd3 S.Kindermann-P.Benko, Aruba 1992 and here, the counterattacking 16 ... f5 takes the fight to White) 14 b3 (note that after 14 Rab1 Be6 15 Qe3 Qb6 16 Qxb6 axb6 17 a4 b5 18 axb5 cxb5 19 Ne2 Rfc8 20 Rfc1 Rc4, Black has taken over the initiative, V.Mencinger-R.Vera, Portoroz 1987) 14 ... Qa5 15 Qe3 Rfd8 16 h3 Be6 17 Rfd1 f6 18 Rd3 Qb6 19 Qh6 Qc5 20 Rad1 Kh8 21 R1d2 Rg8 with even chances, J.Timman-V.Topalov, Novgorod 1995.

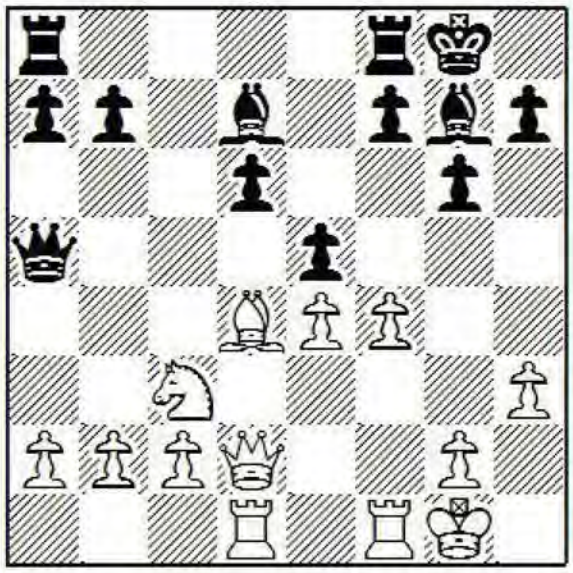
c) 11 f4 (intending to grab space and the initiative) 11 ... Bd7 (11 ... Nxd4 12 Bxd4 e5 13 Be3 exf4 14 Rxf4 Be6 is also fine for Black) 12 Rad1 Rc8 13 h3 and here, Black played the solid looking 13 ... b6?! (13 ... Qa5 14 f5 Nxd4 15 Bxd4 Bc6 looks fully playable for Black).



Question: Why is the move given a dubious mark?

Answer: This insipid move not only restricts the queen's mobility (now that ... Qa5 is not an option), it also allows White to establish a grip as demonstrated by Nevednichy with 14 f5 Ne5 15 b3 Bc6 16 Bg5 Bb7 17 Nd5 Bxd5 18 exd5 a6 19 a4 Qd7 20 c4 and White gets in a whole-board bind, V.Nevednichy-D.Rogozenko, Bucharest 1993. This demonstrates everything Black should avoid in this variation.

11 ... Bd7 12 Rad1 Qa5 13 f4 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 e5



Question: Doesn't this move unnecessarily render Black's d-pawn a backward one, opens the f-file for White and limits the Dragon bishop's scope? Why did Motylev play such an 'anti-positional' move?

Answer: With this central thrust, Black aggressively seeks to equalise by isolating White's e-pawn (after both fxe5 Bxe5 or if Black gets in ... exf4) and subsequently putting pressure on it. As a result, he gets tangible play in return.

Alternatively, Black can try the solid 14 ... Bc6 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Qd4+ f6 17 Rfe1 Qb6 (17 ... Rfd8!? 18 Rd2 e5 19 Qf2 Qb4 looks a little funny for Black, but his position is flexible and he has considerable queenside play) 18 Qxb6 axb6 19 Rd4 Kf7 20 Rb4 Ra6 21 Rd1 f5 and Black has managed to equalise yet unbalance the position enough to make the ending interesting, E.Zude-M.Tazbir, Idstein 2009.

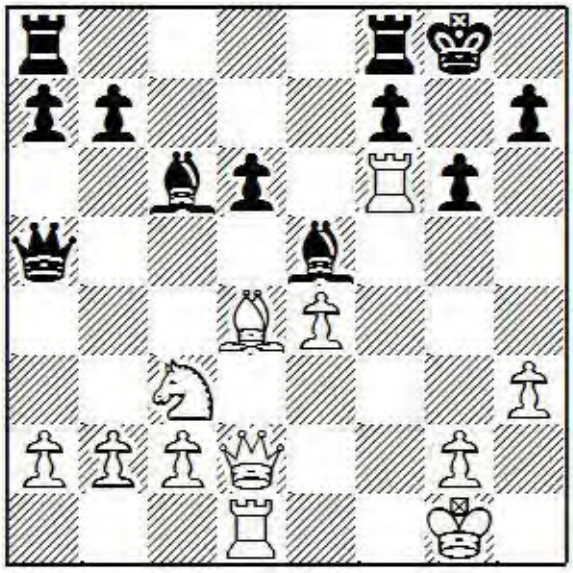
15 Be3

With this move, White intends to claim that Black's d-pawn is weak and that the bishop pair does not accord sufficient compensation for it. An entirely different approach is 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 Be3 Bc6 and now 17 Nd5 Qxd2 18 Rxd2 Bxd5 19 Rxd5 b6 20 c4 will leave Black with a somewhat uncomfortable ending.

15 ... exf4 16 Rxf4 Bc6 17 Bd4 Be5

Black continues to playing the sharpest moves. A solid, perfectively sensible alternative is 17 ... Rad8 18 Rf2 (18 Nd5 Bxd4+ 19 Qxd4 Bxd5 20 Qxd5 Qxd5 21 Rxd5 Rfe8 is more than a little drawish) 18 ... Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Rfe8 20 Rf6 a6 with dynamic equality.

18 Rf6



White dangles the exchange at Black who of course can refrain from taking the rook, a fact definitely not lost on both players. Alternatively, 18 Rf2 Rae8 19 Bxe5 dxe5 20 Nd5 Qxd2 21 Rfxd2 f5 does not give Black anything to worry about.

18 ... Rae8 19 Bxe5

19 Qf2!? looks more dangerous, but Black can hold everything together with 19 ... Re6! 20 Bxe5 dxe5 21 Rf3 Re7 22 a3 f5, and now it is White who has play carefully to keep the balance.

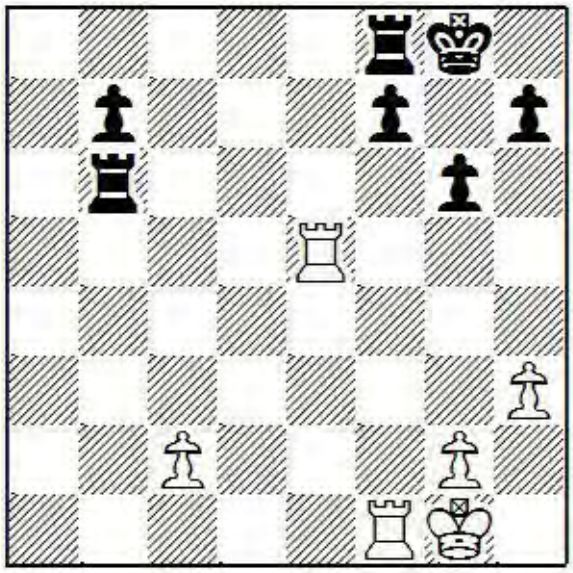
19 ... dxe5 20 Qf2 Qb4 21 Rf1 Qd4 22 Nd5

Or 22 Rd1 Qb4! and White is getting nowhere.

22 ... Bxd5 23 exd5?!

This makes absolutely no sense, allowing Black the better chances in the endgame. White should have played 23 Qxd4! exd4 24 exd5 Rd8 25 Re1 Rxd5 26 Re7 Rc5 27 Rf2 with equal chances in this double rook ending.

23 ... Qxd5 24 Qxa7 Ra8 25 Qb6 Rxa2 26 Rd6 Rxb2 27 Rxd5 Rxb6 28 Rxe5



Black has an extra pawn in the double rook ending, but Short defends accurately and never really allows Black an opportunity to capitalise on his small material advantage.

28 ... f6 29 Rc5 Rf7 30 Rd1 Kg7 31 Kf2 h5 32 h4 Re7 33 Rd3 Rb4 34 g3 f5 35 Rb3 Rd4 36 Rcb5

This is just about the safest set-up for White. Black cannot win the c-pawn without losing his own b-pawn, leaving the game dead drawn.

36 ... Rdd7 37 c4 Kh6 38 c5 Rf7 39 R5b4 Rc7 40 Kf3 Rfd7 41 Rb6 Rf7 42 R3b4 Rfe7 43 R4b5 Red7 44 Rb3 Rxc5

Black decides a draw is fine and forces the liquidation.

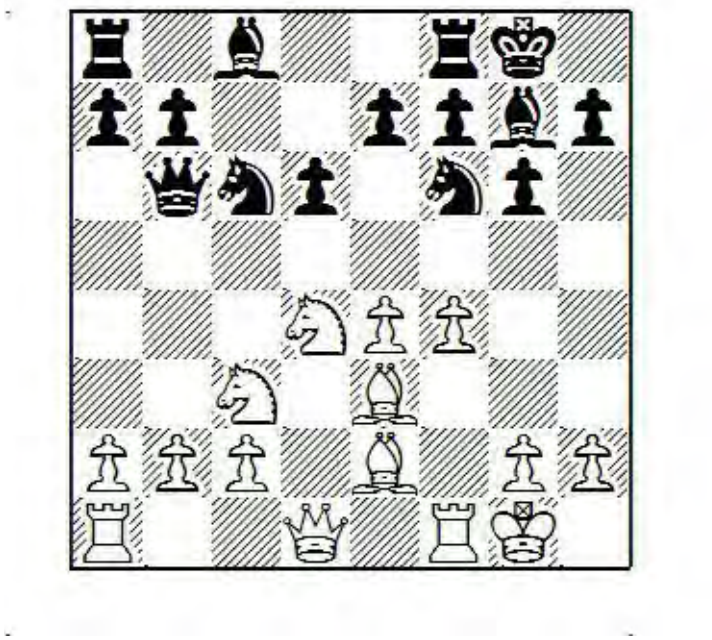
45 Rxb7 Rd6 46 Ra7 g5 47 hxg5+ Kxg5 48 Rg7+ Rg6 ½-½

Game 3
M.Petrov-P.H.Nielsen
Helsinore 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 Nf3 d6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 f4 g6 7 Be3 Bg7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0

We have arrived at a position that is normally reached after 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Be3 Nc6 9 f4, where White's last move is considered an inaccuracy. However, things are not all that terrible for White and in fact several players are specialists in this variation. The player in our main game is one of them while the Grosar siblings and IM Bogdam Podlesnik have also scored very decently in this variation.

9 ... Qb6!



This is the supposed 'refutation' of White's set-up, but it also more or less forces a massive liquidation of material, the result of which is an endgame type of position that he is striving for.

10 Qd3

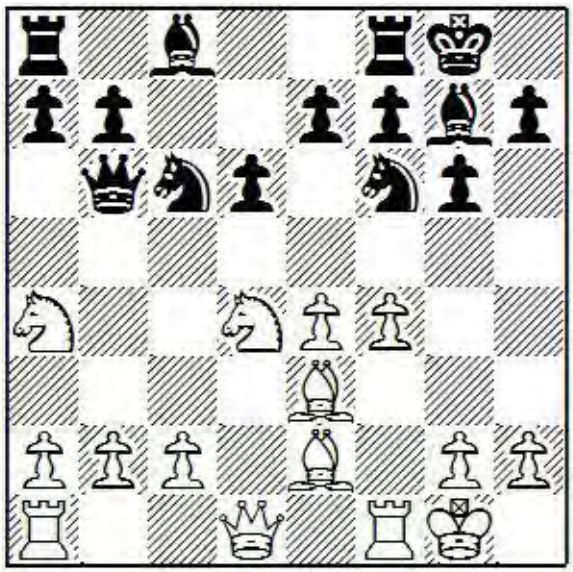
By defending the dark-square bishop, White threatens Nf5 and thus forces Black to take immediate action. The alternatives (apart from 10 Na4) are less challenging:

a) 10 Kh1 Nxe4 11 Nxc6 Qxc6 (11 ... Qxe3 is less convincing as 12 Nxe7+ Kh8 13 Nxe4 Qxe4 14 Nxc8 Raxc8 15 c3 (this is assessed as slightly better for White according to Ftacnik) 15 ... Rcd8 16 Qd2 d5, intending ... d5-d4, looks fully playable for Black) 12 Nd5 Qd7?! (better is the simpler 12 ... Re8!? 13 Bf3 f5 which leaves Black with an extra pawn) 13 Bd4 e5 14 Bf3! exd4?! (14 ... f5!? is also good for Black) 15 Bxe4 Re8 16 Bf3? (16 Qd3 intending f4-f5 is a better option, but even so, Black has the upper hand after Ftacnik's proposed 16 ... f5 17 Bf3 Qf7, followed by ... Be6) 16 ... Qd8!, and White is simply a pawn down with inadequate compensation, O.Romanishin-G.Sosonko, Tilburg 1979.

b) 10 e5?! is the so-called Zollner Gambit, that has been proven inadequate. After 10 ... dxe5 11 fxe5 Nxe5 12 Nf5 Qxb2! 13 Nxe7+ Kh8 14 Bd4 Qb4! 15 Bxe5 Qxe7 16 Qd4 Nh5 17 Bxg7+ Nxg7 (Geller), White obviously doesn't have enough for the pawn.

c) 10 Nf5? looks clever, but it is just a terribly desperate move, which is easily refuted by 10 ... Qxb2! 11 Na4 Qa3 12 c3 Nxe4 13 Bc1 (13 Nxg7 Nxc3 14 Nxc3 Qxc3 15 Bf2 Qxg7 and White has managed to lose three pawns) 13 ... Nxc3 14 Bxa3 Nxd1 15 Nxg7 Ne3 16 Rfc1 Kxg7 and again White is still down three pawns!

d) 10 Na4!? as mentioned, is White's only playable alternative.



After 10 ... Qb4 11 c3 Qa5 12 b4 Qc7 13 Bf3 Bd7 14 Rc1 Rad8 (14 ... a6 15 h3 e5 16 Nxc6 Bxc6 is evaluated as clearly better for Black by some sources, but White is not worse after 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 Nb6 Rad8 19 Qc2 and might even have the upper hand) 15 b5 Na5 16 c4 b6, chances are about even.

10 ... Ng4!

Black takes advantage of the fact that White's d4-knight is now attacked by three pieces to eliminate some pieces and reduce White active potential.

Question: Is the b2-pawn poisoned? Can Black grab it without repercussions?

Answer: Snagging the b-pawn isn't as dangerous as in the Najdorf Poisoned Pawn line. However, after 10 ... Qxb2, White easily regains the pawn after 11 Rab1 Qa3 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Nd5 Qxd3 14 Nxe7+ Kh8 15 cxd3 Ba6 16 Rfe1 c5 17 Nc6 Rfe8 18 Bf2 with a slight edge, J.Radulski-B.Chatalbashev, Bulgaria 2006, though Black is not without chances.

11 Bxg4

The sharper 11 Nd5 is met by 11 ... Bxd4! (11 ... Qd8 12 Bxg4 Bxg4 13 f5 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Be2 was O.Moen-Y.Rantanen, Eksjo 198 and now 15 Qxe2 Bxd4+ 16 Kh1 Be5 would be about even) 12 Bxg4 (12 Nxb6?! Bxe3+ 13 Kh1 Bxb6 14 Bxg4 Bxg4 has been known as clearly better for Black for decades, but the strong Icelandic correspondence player David Olofsson has tested it several times, proving that things are not that simple after 15 f5 Bh5 16 a4 Ne5 17 Qg3 Be2 18 Rfe1 Ba6 19 Ra3 Bc5 20 Rb3 Rac8 and although Black is doing fine here, he actually ended up losing the game, D.Olofsson-B.Jaederholm, correspondence 2007) 12 ... Bxe3+ 13 Qxe3, and here:

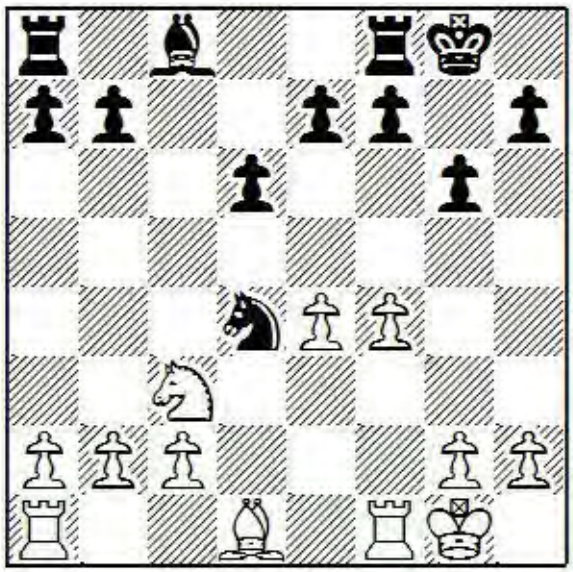
a) 13 ... Qxb2 is an ambitious try to make the game interesting. After 14 Rab1, Black can try: a1) 14 ... Qxa2 15 Bxc8 Rfxc8 16 Rxb7 Rab8? (16 ... Qxc2 17 Rc1 Qa4 is playable for Black) 17 Rxb8 Rxb8 18 Qc3 Qa6 19 Qxc6 Qxc6 20 Nxe7+ Kf8 21 Nxc6 and it is game over for Black, A.Grosar-J.Kutzner, Bad Woerishofen 1991.

a2) 14 ... Qxc2!? 15 Nc3 (apparently threatening the devastating 16 Rfc1 to trap the queen) 15 ... d5!! (the only move that saves the queen) 16 exd5 Bxg4 17 Rf2 Qf5 18 h3 (18 dxc6 bxc6 19 h3 Qe6! 20 Qc5 Bf5 and White has scant compensation for the pawn) 18 ... Na5 19 hxg4 Qxg4 20 Qxe7 Qf5 and Black is

even a little better.

b) 13 ... Qxe3+ 14 Nxe3 Bxg4 15 Nxg4 Rac8 (15 ... Nb4 16 c3 Nd3 17 Rab1 a5 18 Rf3 Nc5 is also without problems for Black, J.Mendivil-J.Alvarez Santa Clara 1968) 16 Ne3 f6 17 Rad1 Na5 18 Rf2 Kf7 19 e5 dxe5 20 fxe5 Rfd8 21 Rdf1 f5 is perfectly comfortable for Black, A.Grosar-C.Ward, Bern 1992.

11 ... Bxd4 12 Bxd4 Qxd4+ 13 Qxd4 Nxd4 14 Bd1!?



A rather quaint 'undeveloping' move, seeking to evict the Nd4 with a future c2-c3. However, the bishop trade 14 Bxc8 Rfxc8 15 Rf2 Rc4 16 Rd1 Rac8 17 Nd5 Nc6 18 Re2 Kf8 leads to a somewhat boring endgame with equal chances, Mi.Becker-J.Dueball, Bundesliga 1992.

14 ... Rd8

Question: What is the purpose of this rook move?

Answer: It is a solid and purposeful move which prepares ... e6 in anticipation of White's pending Nc3-d5 and thus defends the future weakened d6-pawn in advance.

Other tries are:

a) 14 ... Kg7 15 Nd5 e6?! (15 ... Nc6!?, keeping the e7-pawn intact, is more prudent) 16 Ne3 f5 17 c3 Nc6 18 exf5 gxf5 19 Bf3 Ne7 20 Rad1 with a clearly better position for White, R.Felgaer-F.Perez Ponsa, Saenz Pena 2013.

b) 14 ... e5 15 Nd5 Be6 16 Ne7+ (16 c3!? Bxd5 17 exd5 Nf5 18 fxe5 dxe5 19 Re1 f6 looks somewhat more promising for White on account on the passed d-pawn and queenside pawn majority) 16 ... Kh8 (16 ... Kg7 17 f5 Kf6 18 Ng8+ Kg7 19 fxe6 Kxg8 20 exf7+ Rxf7 21 c3 Rxf1+ 22 Kxf1 Rf8+ 23 Kg1 Ne6 24 Bb3 Kf7 is equal) 17 c3 Nc6 18 Nxc6 bxc6 19 fxe5 dxe5 20 Bb3 Bxb3 21 axb3 a5, and even though the players kept the game going for a while, this endgame is about level, J.Radulski-S.Azarov, Bad Wiessee 2010.

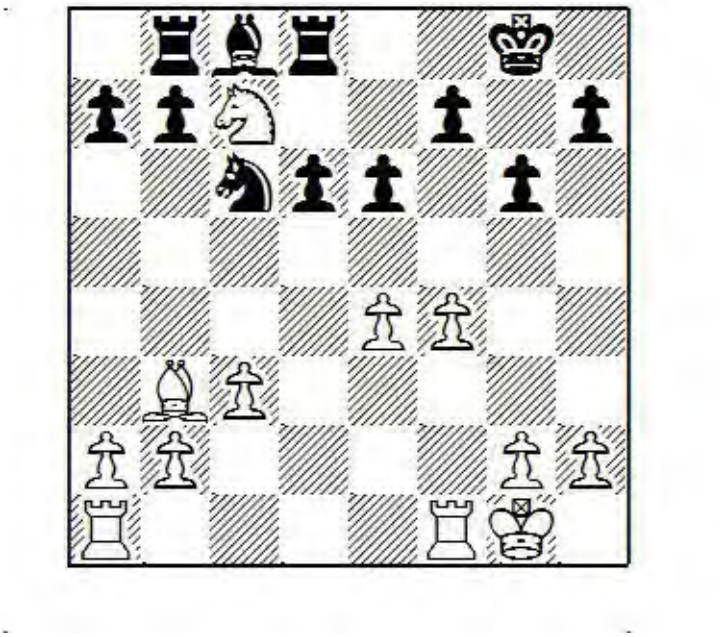
15 Nd5 e6 16 Nc7

I'm not entirely sure what White had in mind when he played this move, because the threat is very simple to parry. Sticking the knight on the c7-square is akin to putting your hand in the lion's mouth with no particular benefit in return. The saner alternative is 16 Ne3 which doesn't threaten anything, nor does it make the position any worse. The game is quite equal after 16 ... d5 17 exd5 exd5 18 Rf2 Nc6 19 Bf3 d4 20 Nd5 Rb8.

16 ... Rb8 17 c3 Nc6 18 Bb3?!

The safer choice is 18 Be2 and after 18 ... a6 19 b4 Ne7 20 Rfd1 Bd7 21 b5 axb5 22 Rxd6 Bc6 23 e5

Rdc8, chances are even.



18 ... Kf8?!

In my opinion, Black plays a little too unambitiously here, settling for an even position. Instead 18 ... b5!? leaves the White c7-knight stranded in the enemy camp, and it will take some effort to get it extracted.

19 Nb5 Ke7

A perfectly solid try is 19 ... a6 20 Nd4 Nxd4 21 cxd4 Bd7 22 Rac1 Rbc8 and chances are split down the middle.

20 Rad1 a6 21 Nd4 Bd7

The knight trade 21 ... Nxd4 leads to a position similar to that in our main game: 22 Rxd4 Bd7 23 Rfd1 Bc6 with even chances in the endgame.

22 Rf2

More aggressive is 22 f5!? and it looks more promising than the game continuation. However, Black nevertheless appears to be fine after 22 ... Ne5 23 h3 b5 24 f6+ Ke8 and it isn't immediately apparent how White can push for more.

22 ... Nxd4

A natural choice to kill the last vestiges of a white initiative.

23 Rxd4

White doesn't achieve anything after 23 cxd4 either. For instance, after 23 ... Rbc8 24 d5 a5 25 a3 Bb5, it is clear that Black is doing just fine.

23 ... Bc6 24 Rfd2 Rd7 25 Kf2 f6

Black continues in solid non-committal fashion. A perfectly good alternative is the more forcing 25 ... e5 26 fxe5 dxe5 27 Rxd7+ Bxd7 with even chances.

26 Ke3 Rbd8 27 g3 ½-½

Here, the players agreed to a draw, not that anything has changed much over the last several moves. The game has been very level and remains so.

Game 4
S.Kudrin-D.Gurevich
US Championships, Saint Louis 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Be2 g6 7 0-0 Bg7 8 Be3 0-0 9 h3

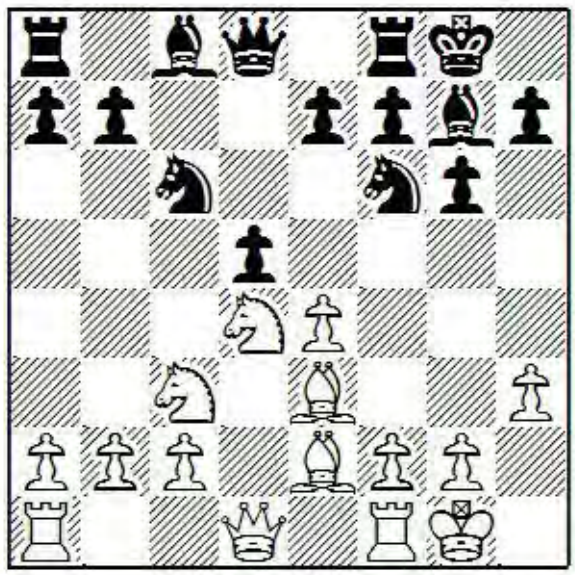
This move has an incredibly pedigree. It has been essayed by the top players of the 19th and early 20th

centuries such as Alapin, Mieses, Tarrasch and Lasker. What makes it particularly remarkable is the fact that the move is entirely harmless. Black can equalise in several ways, but the problem is that in most cases, the easiest way also takes the winning prospects out of the game. Therefore Black has to weigh how badly he wants to win, or if a problem-free equality is sufficient for starters.

Question: What is the point of this 'insipid' move?

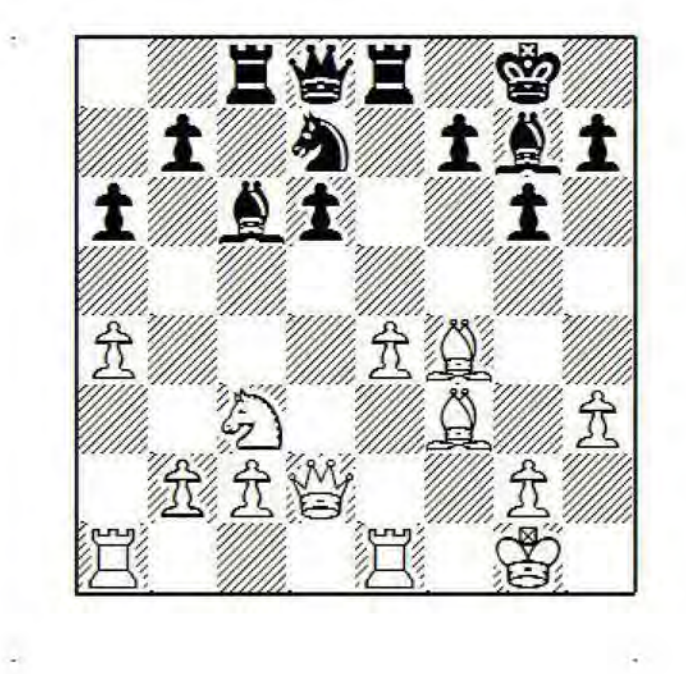
Answer: White wants to play Qd2 without his e3-bishop being harassed by a ... Ng4 sally.

9 ... d5



Normally, this is the move White wants to avoid as it is a clean equaliser for Black. But if White believes that he is a better player than Black and a simpler position will better manifest that, then it could be an option. Note that this position can also be reached from an Accelerated Dragon move order: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Be2 0-0 8 0-0 d5, with the sole difference that White has an extra h2-h3 move here. In the next main game, we will see a similar option, where White has used the extra move to play Kg1-h1.

The most common option for Black here is 9 ... Bd7 and after 10 Qd2 a6 (Black also can engage in transactions with 10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bc6 12 Qd3 Nd7 13 Bxg7 Kxg7, with a perfectly fine position) 11 a4 Rc8 12 f4 Nxd4 13 Bxd4 Bc6 (13 ... e5 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 Be3 (15 Bxe5? Nxe4 16 Nxe4 Bxe5 is much better for Black due to the bishop pair and the weakened White kingside pawn structure guaranteeing Black the initiative) 15 ... Bc6 16 Bd3 Nh5 and Black has an easy game) 14 Bf3 e5 15 Be3 exf4 16 Bxf4 Re8 17 Rfe1 Nd7:



Question: The d6-pawn hangs, doesn't it?

Answer: It is quite unpalatable actually, whether White captures it with either queen or bishop:
a) After 18 Bxd6?? Ne5!, White's position collapses rapidly following 19 Rad1 Nc4 20 Qf4 Nxb2 and Black is winning.
b) 18 Qxd6 Qb6+ 19 Be3 Qxb2 20 Nd5 Bf8 21 Rab1 Qa2, and White loses material.

c) More prudent is 18 a5 Ne5 (18 ... Bxc3!? looks completely illogical but is actually quite promising for Black after 19 Qxc3 (or 19 bxc3 Ne5 with a pleasant game for Black) 19 ... Bxe4 20 Qa3 d5, and White has limited compensation for the pawn) 19 Be2 b5 20 axb6 Qxb6+ 21 Kh1 Bb7 with the better chances for Black due to his better piece coordination, A.Ramirez Alvarez-B.Gulko, Merida 2002.

10 exd5 Nxd5

Black can also try 10 ... Nb4!? in order to limit the minor piece trades. After 11 Qd2 (11 d6!? Qxd6 12 Ncb5 Qb8 13 c4 a6 14 Nc3 looks more comfortable for White, even if similar positions are normally considered fully adequate for Black) 11 ... Nbxd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Bh6 e5 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Nf3 Nf4 16 Qe3 f6 17 Rfd1 Qc7, Black has a pleasant position with a nasty-looking f4-knight on f4 and more space, L.Ljubojevic-G.Sosonko, Amsterdam 1975.

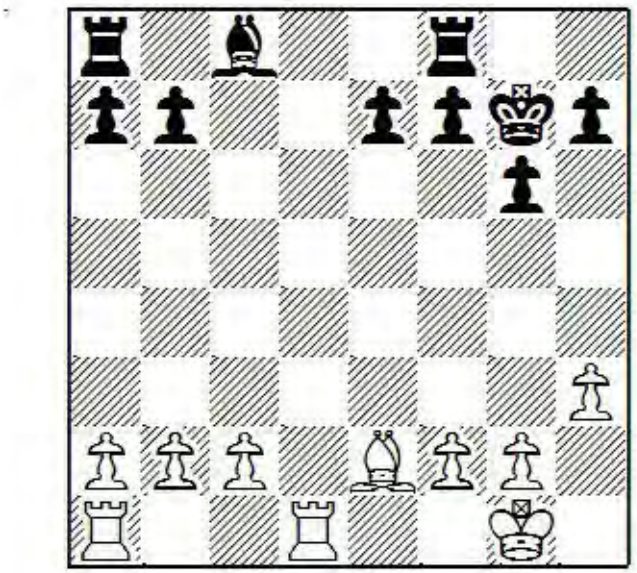
11 Nxd5 Nxd4

Now Black just decides to exchange as much as possible to reach a drawn endgame.

A somewhat more ambitious alternative is 11 ... Qxd5 12 Bf3 Qa5 13 c3 (13 Nxc6 looks logical, but is also entirely harmless for Black after 13 ... bxc6 14 c3 Rd8 15 Qc2 Bf5 and Black obviously has no issues at all) 13 ... Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Rd8 15 Qe2 Bxd4 16 cxd4 Be6 17 Rfd1 Rd7 18 d5 Bxd5 19 Bxd5 Rxd5 20 Qxe7 and here the players agreed to a draw as there is very little left to play for, V.Romanenko-S.Kudrin, New York 2011.

12 Bxd4 Qxd5 13 Bxg7 Qxd1 14 Rfxd1 Kxg7

You have to be a bit of an optimist or easily excitable to see winning chances for either side in this position. This is the problem with the ... d6-d5 equaliser. The resulting positions can get very stale easily enough with massive piece trades.



15 Bf3 Bf5 16 c4 Rac8 17 b3 Rc7 18 Rd4 Rfc8 19 Bg4 Bxg4 20 hxg4 a6 21 a4

White has more space and control of the only entirely open file. Nevertheless, the game is even. White cannot use the open file significantly.

21 ... h6 22 Kf1 Rc6 23 a5

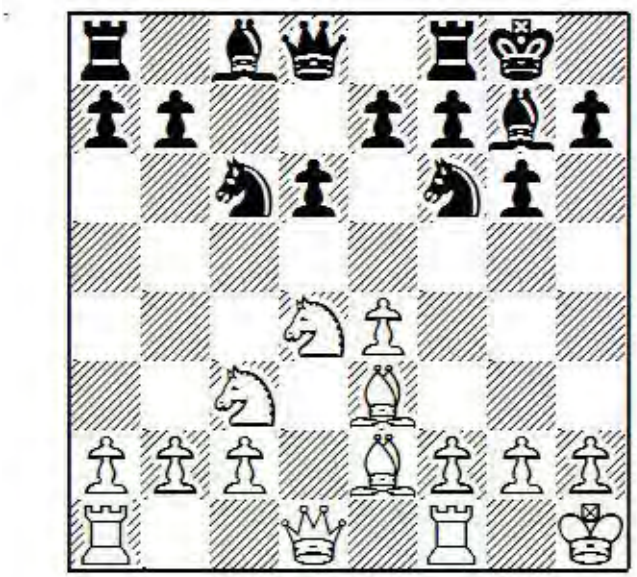
This looks ambitious, but it just allows further simplifications.

23 ... Rb8 24 Ke2 b6 25 axb6 Rcxb6 26 Rd3 Rxb3 27 Rxb3 Rxb3 28 Rxa6 h5 29 gxh5 gxh5 30 g3 Rc3 31 Rc6 e6 32 Kd2 Rf3 33 Ke2 Rc3 34 Kd2 Rf3 ½-½

And at long last, the players to suspend the action, allowing the bored spectators a rest.

Game 5
B.Munguntuul-Li Chao
Caleta 2014

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Be2 g6 7 0-0 Bg7 8 Be3 0-0 9 Kh1



Question: How about this king tuck? Is there anything in this move or is it merely a 'pass'?

Answer: The main idea of Kh1 is to prepare for f2-f4 without letting the king get exposed to a hit on the g1-h7 diagonal after ... Qb6. A

second idea is to wait and see if Black will get inspired into playing the seemingly logical 9 ... Ng4?? which simply loses a piece after 10 Bxg4 Bxg4 11 Nxc6 Bxd1 12 Nxd8, a trap which had claimed the likes of GM Julian Hodgson way back in 1986, when he was still an IM.

9 ... Bd7!?

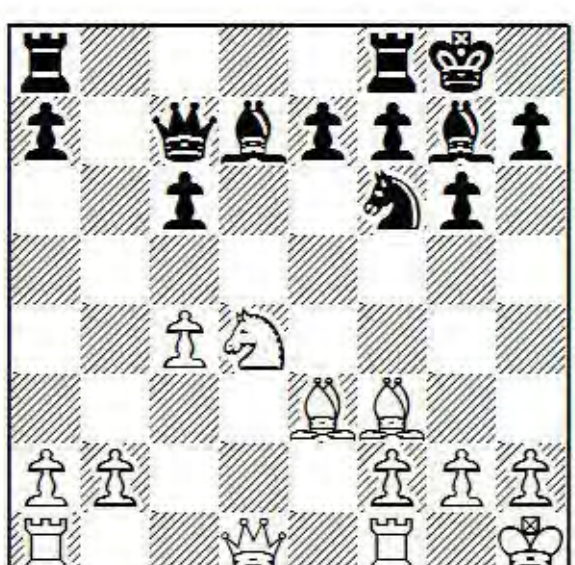
Black has to decide whether he wants a safe path to equality or a more solid, slightly more passive set-up that offers better long-term chances of playing for a win. The latter can be quite important if you are the higher rated player and need to win the game.

a) The easy equaliser 9 ... d5 is not to everybody's taste:

a1) After 10 exd5:

a11) It is not easy to generate winning chances after 10 ... Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5!? (11 ... Nxd4 12 Bxd4 Qxd5 13 Bxg7 Qxd1 14 Raxd1 Kxg7 15 Bf3 Bf5 is completely even, H.Proehl-D.Hausrath, Steinsfurt 1992) 12 Bf3 (12 Nxc6 Qxc6 13 c3 e5 is also even, but probably easier for Black to play) 12 ... Qa5 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 c3 (14 Bxc6 Rb8 15 Qd5 Qc7 16 Ba4 Bxb2 and Black has the better pawn structure, H.Bartels-S.Sievers, Hamburg 1997) 14 ... Rb8 15 Qc1 c5 is entirely problem-free for Black whose activity compensates for his weaker pawn structure, K.Kopetzky-M.Filip, Vienna 1949.

a12) Black may vary with 10 ... Nb4, which attempts to avoid an immediate mass liquidation of the minor pieces after 11 d6 (11 Bc4?! Nbxd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Bxd5 Qxd5 14 c3 Bd7 15 Qf3 Qxf3 16 Nxf3 e5 17 Nd2 Bc6 is comfortably better for Black, as his spatial plus and the bishop pair guarantees Black a long-term initiative, V.Mandarin-V.Inkiov, Cannes 1992) 11 ... Qxd6 12 Ncb5 Qb8 13 c4 Nc6 14 Nxc6 bxc6 15 Nd4 Bd7 16 Bf3 Qc7.



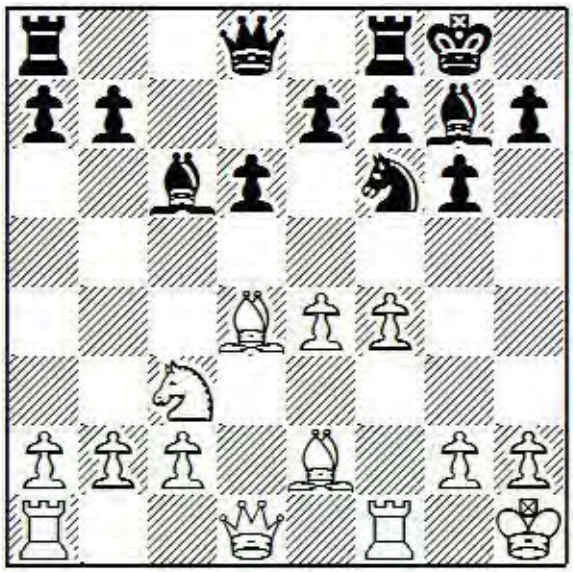
This occurred in V.Valenta-S.Vesselovsky, Frydek Mistek 1996 and chances are balanced. At least this leads to interesting play with Black poised to advance his e-pawn.

a2) 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 e5 Ne4! (11 ... Ne8 12 f4 f6 13 exf6 Bxf6 is also possible, offering Black good chances as well) 12 Nxe4 (12 f4 Nxc3 13 bxc3 Qa5 is slightly better for Black according to Boensch) 12 ... dxe4 13 Qxd8 (or 13 Bd4 Qc7 and Black has a large advantage due to White's e-pawn weakness) 13 ... Rxd8 14 Rfd1 Be6 15 Bd4 f5 offers Black good chances, and he did in fact go on to win the game, M.Adams-A.Khalifman, Las Palmas 1993.

b) Another interesting option is 9 ... Nxd4 which, I must admit, is not a move I would have considered as Black until I came across when working on this book. Black appears to get a satisfactory game after 10 Bxd4 e5 (10 ... b6 is less forcing and looks somewhat passive, but works well too as after 11 f4 Bb7 12 Bf3 Rc8 13 Qd3 Rc7 14 Nb5 Rd7 15 c4?! e5! 16 Be3 Re8, Black's pieces have awoken from their previously passive positions, A.Hunt-V.Epishin, Bratto 2005) 11 Be3 Be6 12 f4 exf4 (12 ... d5 is also

fine 13 f5 d4 14 fxe6 fxe6 15 Qd3 dxe3 16 Qxe3 Qd4 and despite the doubled e-pawn, Black has a pleasant position) 13 Bxf4 Qb6 14 Rb1 Rfc8 15 Bg5 Nd7 16 Nd5 Bxd5 17 Qxd5 Ne5 18 c3 Rc5 19 Qd2 and White has at best a tiny advantage on account of his pair of bishops, D.Barua-E.Gufeld, New Delhi 1984.

10 f4 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bc6



This position resembles an Accelerated Dragon that can occur after 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 Qa5 8 0-0 0-0 9 Bb3 d6 10 h3 Bd7 11 f4 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bc6, here with the difference that Black does not have his queen on the a5-square and White's king is meaningfully tucked away in the corner.

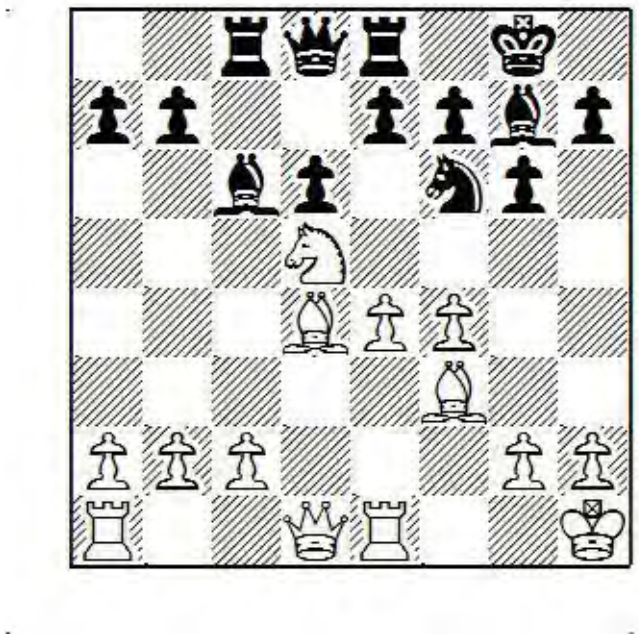
12 Bf3 Rc8!?

In a game between two young (soon to be very strong) grandmasters, Black instead went with 12 ... Re8, hinting heavily at the option of playing ... e7-e5, which encouraged White to go for it himself with 13 e5!? (13 Qe2 e5 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 Be3 Qe7 16 Rad1 a6 is comfortably even with no issues to mention for Black) 13 ... dxe5!? (13 ... Bxf3 14 Qxf3 dxe5 15 Bxe5 Qb6 is equal) 14 fxe5 Bxf3 15 Rxf3 Ng4 16 e6 f5 17 Bxg7 Qxd1+ (Black should most likely have left the queens on for now as there is no reason to hand White the d-file at no charge and after 17 ... Kxg7 18 h3 Nf6, Black is probably just better as the e6-pawn is easy to target with ... Qb6) 18 Rxd1 Kxg7 19 Rd7 Ne5 (forking the rooks looks so much like the best move that it is difficult to consider other options, but Black would have been better off in the endgame after 19 ... Kf6 20 h3 Kxe6 21 Rxb7 Ne5 22 Rf2 Reb8 23 Rxb8 Rxb8 24 b3 Nd7 since the pawns in the centre will bother White a lot more, particular so as he is supported by the active black king, whereas White's king will need quite a few moves before he can make a similar impact on the queenside) 20 Re3! Nxd7 21 exd7 Rf8 22 Rxe7+ Rf7 23 Re8 Rf8 24 Re7+ Rf7 25 Re8 Rf8 with a draw by repetition in D.Andreikin-R.Mamedov, Kirishi 2005.

13 Re1 Re8

Connecting the rooks and activating the queen in the style of the Accelerated Dragon line I mentioned above is worthy of consideration as well. For instance, 13 ... Qa5!? 14 a3 e5 15 fxe5 dxe5 16 Be3 Rfd8 17 Qe2 Qc7 18 Rad1 b6 and the chances are split down the middle.

14 Nd5?!



Question: Why is the dubious mark attached to this natural move which already has been prepared with Re1 and Bf3? Isn't this is a typical motif to press Black?

Answer: The problem is, Black can calmly ignore the knight and open the position in his favour with his next strong move.

The natural continuation is 14 Qd3!? Nd7!? 15 e5 dxe5 16 fxe5 Nf8 17 Bg4 Ne6 18 Bxe6 fxe6 looks strange for Black, but the c6-bishop is a powerhouse that easily makes up for the flawed pawn structure and slightly odd piece coordination.

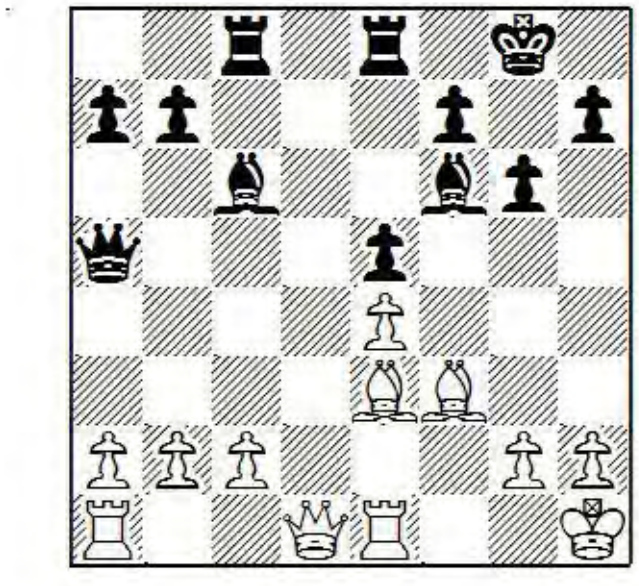
14 ... e5!

With this counterattacking blow, Black wrestles over the initiative as White has no good way to handle the central transactions in his favour.

15 fxe5

If instead 15 Bf2, Black's e-pawn turns into a monster after 15 ... Bxd5 16 exd5 e4 17 Be2 e3 18 Bg1 Qb6.

15 ... dxe5 16 Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Be3 Qa5!?



Black's pieces leaves a much more coordinated and pleasant impression, whereas White's pieces are

rather passively placed. Black has an alternative that looks a little time-consuming, but comes endorsed by my engine: 17 ... Bh4!? 18 g3 Be7 19 c3 Qc7 20 Qe2 Red8 and Black's investment in time to force g2-g3 could well prove worthwhile.

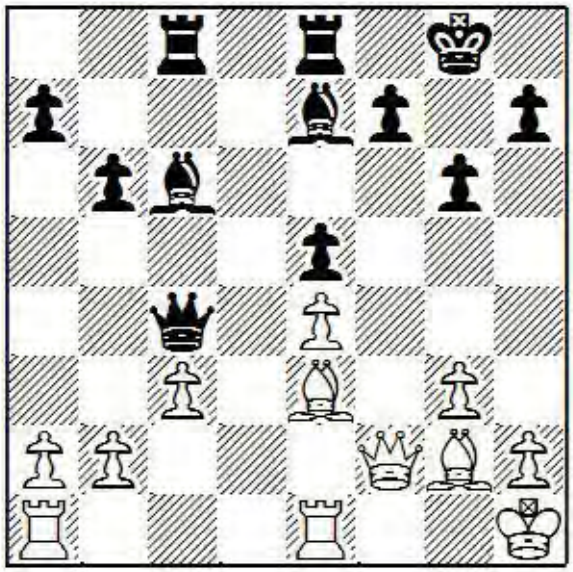
18 Qe2 Bh4!? 19 g3?!

Now this makes less sense than playing it had Black played 17 ... Bh4 instead. The alternative 19 Rec1 Qc7 20 a4 b6 would only leave White marginally worse. The Chinese GM starts turning the screws on.

19 ... Be7 20 Qf2 b6 21 Bg2 Qb4!

Black takes a good look at White's weak e4-pawn.

22 c3 Qc4

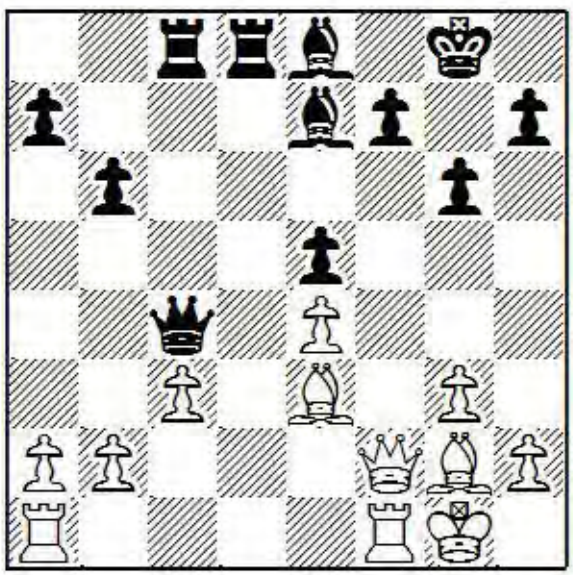


Black's queen skulks onto this excellent square where it exerts a great deal of influence on the centre and the queenside.

23 Kg1

Indirectly protecting the pawn, since 23 ... Bxe4 24 Bxe4 Qxe4 25 Bxb6 regains the pawn with interest.

23 ... Red8 24 Rf1 Be8



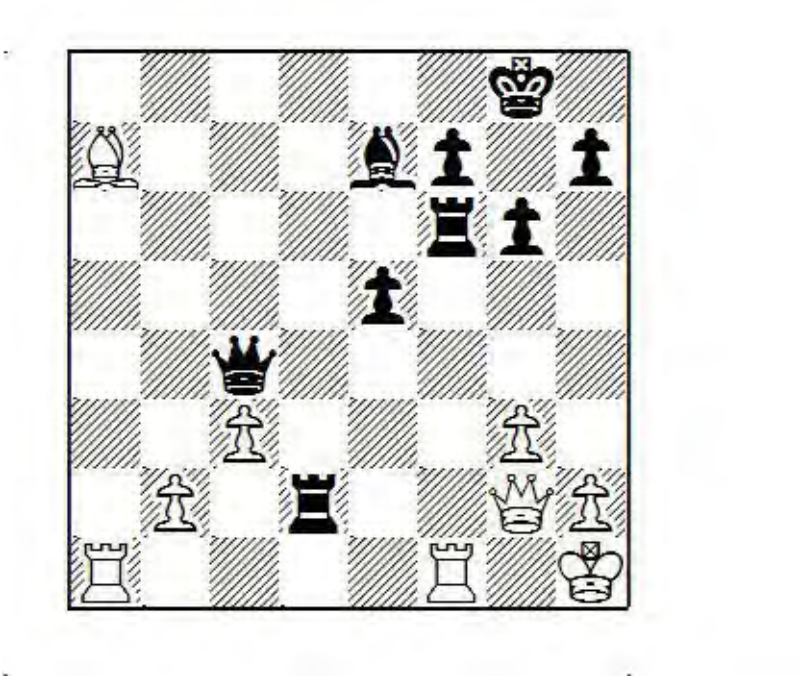
Black safeguards the f7-pawn, keeping the queen free to move, thus also discouraging moves like 25

b3, as the queen doesn't have any guard duties on f7.

25 a4?

Now things really go from bad to worse for White. My dad once told me that weaker players will often hang themselves when you give them the opportunity and enough rope. That is most certainly the case here. White needed to defend patiently, but instead chooses to seek counterplay on the queenside. Part of the problem with this move is that Black now has the freedom to place his pieces wherever he wants. In particular the queen is left unimpeded on the c4-square where she exerts tremendous pressure on White's pawns. The more solid 25 Rfe1 is much sturdier and after 25 ... Bd7 26 Bf1 Qa4 27 b3 Qc6 28 Rad1 Be6 29 Rxd8+ Rxd8 30 c4 Bc8, while Black is better, there is still a lot of play left.

25 ... Rd3 26 Kh1 Bc6 27 a5 Bxe4 28 axb6 axb6 29 Bxb6 Rc6 30 Ba7 Rf6 31 Qe2 Bxg2+ 32 Qxg2 Rd2



33 Qa8+?

Another bad idea. White should have forced Black to prove that he can win the endgame after 33 Qxd2 Rxf1+ 34 Rxf1 Qxf1+ 35 Bg1 Bc5 36 Qg2 Qc1 37 b4 Be3 38 c4 Bxg1 39 Qxg1 Qxc4.

33 ... Kg7 34 Rfe1 Bc5 35 b3?

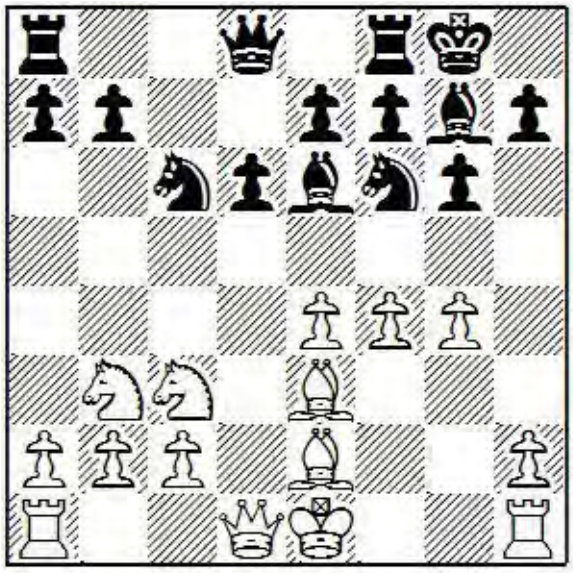
Or 35 Bxc5 Qxc5 36 Red1 Re2 37 Re1 Rxb2 38 Reb1 Qxc3 39 Rxb2 Qxb2 40 Re1 Rf2 and it is also game over.

35 ... Rff2! 0-1

Mate is inevitable. An impressive demonstration by the Chinese GM on how to exert pressure meaningfully, utilising the Sicilian pawn structure.

Game 6
T.Thorhallsson-G.Jones
Reykjavik 2013

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 Be3 0-0 8 f4 Nc6 9 Nb3 Be6 10 g4

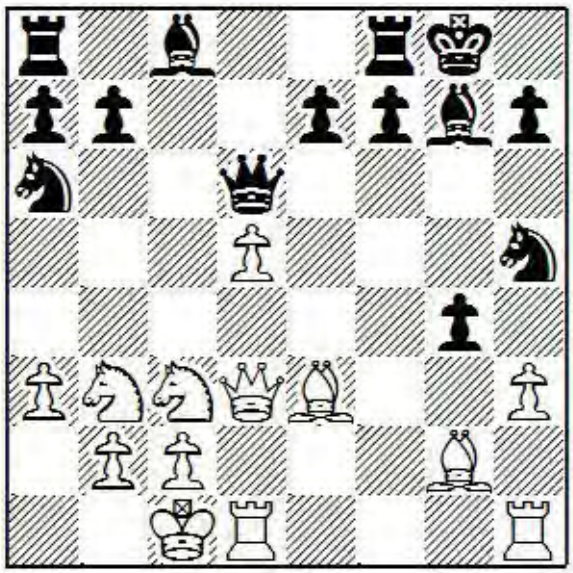


This move looks very threatening and it has brought White many splendid victories. The general plan is to boot the f6-knight off the defence of the kingside with f4-f5, followed by prising open the h-file with h2-h4-h5. The f4-f5 spike to chase off the Be6 is also frequently utilised. White's set-up is known as the Alekhine Attack on the account of Alekhine-Botvinnik, Nottingham 1936 but Russian GM Yuri Yakovich is the leading modern specialist in this line, taking out quite a few GMs with it. However, if Black keeps his head cool, and this is definitely needed, he will be doing quite well.

10 ... Rc8

The fact that both Gawain Jones and Yakovich choose this natural developing move should give us every reason to follow in their footsteps. The alternatives are playable but in my opinion less reliable and can be a lot more frightening to enter as Black:

a) The immediate counterattacking 10 ... d5 was the choice of Botvinnik in his games against Alekhine and Levenfish way back in 1936. After 11 f5 Bc8 12 exd5 Nb4 13 Bf3 gxf5 14 a3 (after 14 g5, 14 ... Ng4 is safest) 14 ... fxg4 15 Bg2 (returning the pawn) 15 ... Na6 16 Qd3 Qd6 17 0-0-0 Nh5 18 h3, White is beginning to open files in the direction of Black's king.



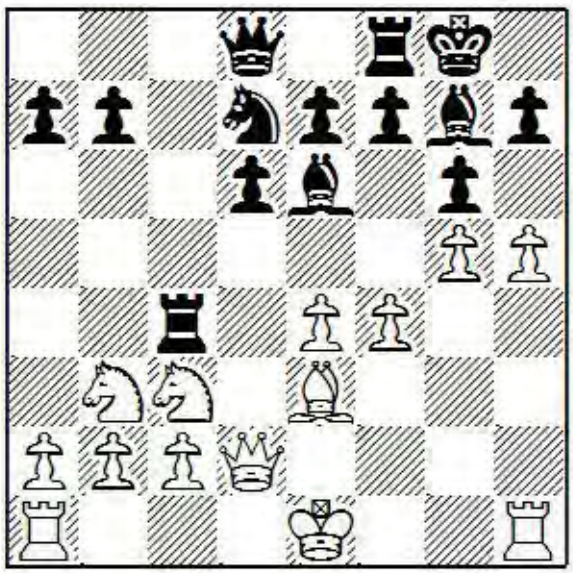
Black requires considerable defensive skill to hold this sort of position. Following 18 ... Nf4 19 Qe4

Nxg2 20 hxg4, although Black eventually managed to hold the draw in this game, it was terrifying to watch the proceedings, Y.Yakovich-M.Sadler, Koge 1997.

b) 10 ... Na5 is not as confrontational as 10 ... d5, but definitely playable. Personally I haven't had great experiences with it as Black, but that mostly came down to my poor follow-up rather than the actual value of this move. Now White can go in a couple of directions:

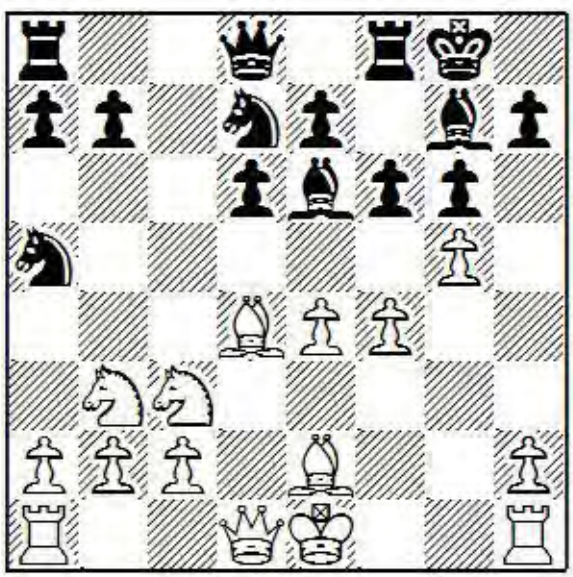
b1) 11 g5 Nd7 also works (less accurate is 11 ... Ne8 12 Qd2 Rc8 13 Bd4 Nc4 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 0-0-0 Qd7 16 Qd3 Rc8 17 h4 Bg4 18 Rd2 b6 19 Nd5 with the better chances for White, I.Kan-M.Botvinnik, Moscow 1936) and here, we have the following options:

b11) 12 Qd2 Rc8 13 h4 Nc4 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 h5 was P.Motwani-A.Mestel, Swansea 1987.



Here, it looks like Black can play the bold 15 ... Bxc3! 16 bxc3 Rxe4 and I don't see White's attack crashing through immediately.

b12) 12 Bd4 f6!? (My computer tends to favour 12 ... Bxd4 which has used on several occasions, for example after 13 Qxd4 Nc6!? 14 Qd2 a5!? 15 Bb5 Qb6 16 h4, M.Mendonca-W.Rocha, Vitoria 2013, and now 16 ... Bg4 would give even chances) and now White has a plethora of choices:



b121) 13 gxf6 Nxf6 14 Qd2 Rc8 15 f5 Bf7 16 Bd3 and the players already split the point A.Shabalov-B.Finegold, USA Ch (Key West) 1994. However, Black is better after both 16 ... Nc6 or 16 ... e5!?.

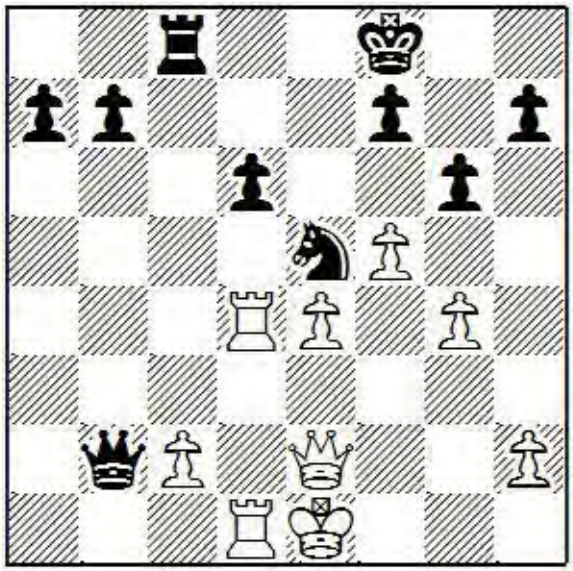
b122) 13 Nd5 Nxb3 (13 ... Nc6!? could well be considerably better, for instance 14 gxf6 Nxf6 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nxf6+ Rxf6 17 Qd2 Qb6 18 0-0-0 Raf8 leaves Black with a very nice game) 14 axb3 fxg5 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Qd4+ Kg8 17 Bc4, A.Jongsma-C.Lutz, Tilburg 1993, and

now 17 fxg5 gxf4! (17 ... Ne5, putting a cork in the a1-h8 diagonal, is fine for Black as well) 18 Nxf4 Bxc4 19 Qxc4+ Rf7 20 Ne6 Qb6 21 0-0-0 Ne5 22 Qd5 Qc6 and Black is a pawn up without a shadow of compensation for White.

b123) 13 h4!? fxg5 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Nd4 Bg8 16 f5 Ne5 17 hxg5 Nac6 18 Nxc6 bxc6 19 Qd2 Rb8 20 0-0-0 Qa5? (20 ... Qb6! is much better, even though this too looks scary along the way to equality and after 21 b3 gxf5 22 g6 f4 23 gxh7 Bxh7 24 Rdg1+ Bg6 25 Bh5 Qe3, things will settle down once the queens are exchanged off) 21 f6+ (21 Rdf1!? keeps the pressure on) 21 ... exf6 22 Qxd6 fxg5?? (22 ... Rbe8 would keep White's advantage within limits) 23 Rd5 Bxd5 24 Qxe5+ Kg8 25 exd5 Qb4 26 Ne4 and since there is no way to meet the threat of Nf6 satisfactorily, Black called it quits in R.Felgaer-M.Andres Mendez, Buenos Aires 1998.

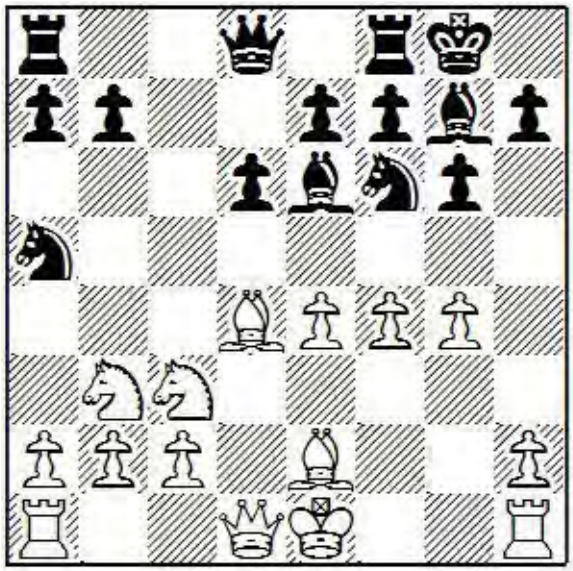
b2) 11 f5 forces Black to use the c4-square for his bishop (which is the idea behind 10 ... Na5) and following 11 ... Bc4 12 Nxa5 (12 Bd3 is often a good move in such situations, but here Black remains unimpressed as after 12 ... Bxd3 13 cxd3 Nxb3 14 axb3 d5! 15 g5 d4 16 gxf6 Bxf6, Black regains the piece and White's pawn structure is an utter mess, A.Giaccio-A.Fier, Sao Paulo 2006) 12 ... Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Qxa5, White has to decide where to put his king.

b21) Less common is 14 0-0-0 and after 14 ... Rfc8 15 Bd4 Nd7 16 Nd5 Bxd4 17 Rxd4 Qxa2 18 Nxe7+ Kf8 19 Nxc8, A.Yuneev-A.Petrosian, Daugavpils 1989, now 19 ... Rxc8 20 Rhd1 Qa1+ 21 Kd2 Qxb2 22 Ke1 Ne5 leads to a fascinating position where Black has full compensation for the exchange.



b22) The more popular choice is 14 0-0 and after 14 ... Qe5 15 Bf4 Qc5+ 16 Kh1, J.Koch-R.Fontaine, France 2002, and now 16 ... Rfe8 17 Rad1 Rac8 looks promising for Black.

c) 11 Bd4!? has scored phenomenally for White and Black has to play accurately here:



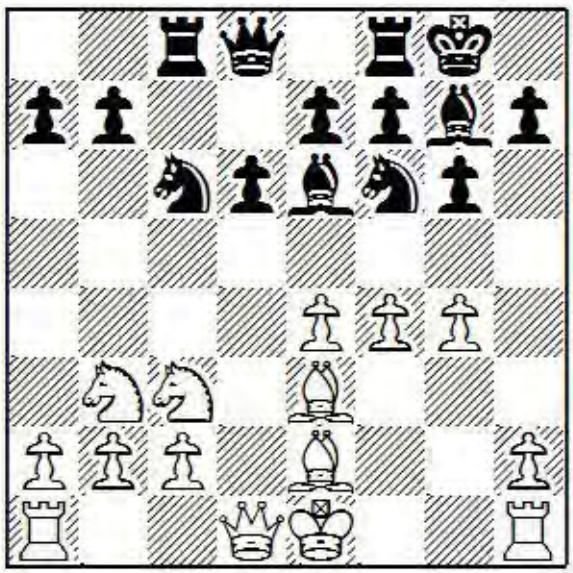
c1) A risky try is 11 ... Bc4:

c11) 12 g5 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 (This is probably the key position after 10 ... Na5, and it is problematic for Black. As a consequence, Black should stay away from 10 ... Na5 unless he after 11 Bd4 intends to reply 11 ... Nc6) 13 ... Nd7 (13 ... Nh5 is the lesser evil, slowing down White's pawn storm on the kingside) 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 0-0-0 Rc8 16 h4 Nc4 17 h5 with a nasty attack, Y.Yakovich-M.Erdogdu, Ankara 2010.

c12) 12 Nxa5 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Qxa5 14 0-0-0 initially looked good for White but 14 ... b5! gives Black adequate counterplay, the point being that after 15 a3 (15 e5 dxe5 16 fxe5 Nxg4! 17 Qxg4 b4 18 Ne2 Qxa2 and I like Black's aggressive chances) 15 ... b4 16 axb4 Qxb4 17 g5 Nh5 18 Nd5 Qb7 19 Bxg7 Kxg7, Black has strong counterplay down the a- and b-files.

c2) Stronger is 11 ... Nc6! 12 g5 (12 Be3 would just repeat the position and give Black a chance to change variations) The tactics work out for Black after 12 ... Nxd4! 13 gxf6 (13 Nxd4 Nh5! 14 Bxh5 Qb6! 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 Ne2 gxh5) 13 ... Bxb3 14 fxg7 Nxc2+ 15 Kd2 Kxg7 16 Rc1 (16 axb3 Nxa1 17 Qxa1 Qb6 White's weak king and worse structure means Black's rook and two pawns are at least no worse than the bishop and knight) 16 ... Nd4 17 axb3 f5 gives Black great compensation for the piece.

Let's return to the stem game position after 10 ... Rc8.



11 g5

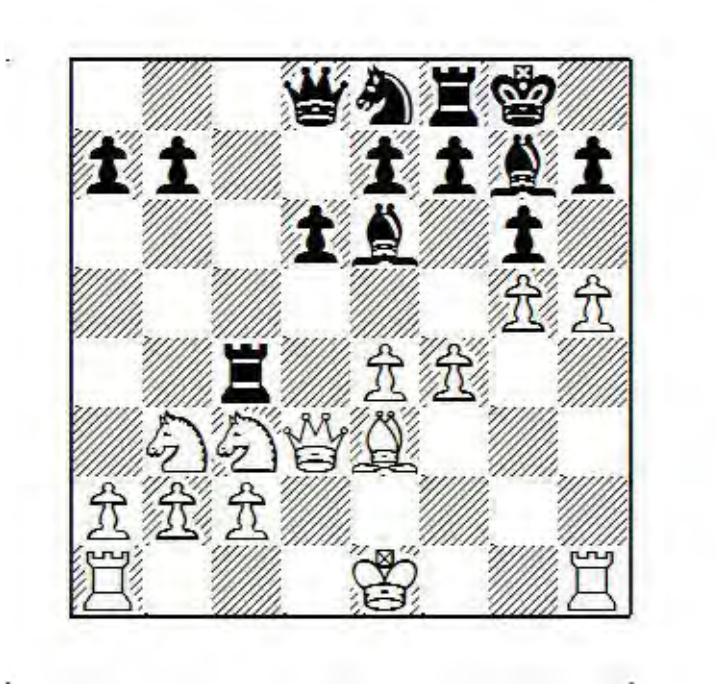
The main alternative is 11 f5, but Black is absolutely fine in this line:

a) 11 ... Bxb3!? 12 axb3 d5 13 exd5 Nb4 14 Bf3 Nfxd5! 15 Nxd5 (15 Bxd5 allows 15 ... Bxc3+ 16 bxc3 Rxc3 17 Bh6 Qb6 18 fxg6 hxg6 19 Be4 Rd8 20 Qe2, and now 20 ... Qf6 is quite unpleasant for White) 15 ... Nxc2+ 16 Kf2 Nxa1 17 Qxa1 Rc2+ 18 Kg3 and here, Gawain Jone's 18 ... Be5+ will with best play and fairly forced play lead to an advantage for Black. After 19 Kh3 e6 20 Qd1 Rxb2 21 Bd4 Bxd4 22 Qxd4 Rxb3 23 Nf6+ Kh8 24 Nd7+ e5 25 Qxe5+ f6 26 Qd6 Rg8, Black should be on top.

b) 11 ... Bd7 (planning ... Ne5 and ... Rxc3) 12 g5 Nxe4! (12 ... Ne8 13 0-0 Ne5 14 Bxa7 Rxc3! 15 bxc3 b6 is advantageous for Black, M.Bartel-R.Wojtaszek, Wroclaw 2010) 13 Nxe4 Bxf5 14 Bd3 Bxb2 (the only game in this line saw Black try 14 ... Nb4 15 Nd4 Qa5 16 0-0 Bxd4 17 Bxd4 Qd5 (Black wins back material) 18 Nf6+ exf6 19 Bxf5 gxf5 20 Bxf6 Rxc2 when 21 Qxd5 Nxd5 22 Rxf5 Nxf6 23 Rxf6 Rxb2 24 Rxd6 Rc8 with a double rook ending that Black won, F.Schuh-G.Imhof, Austria 1998) 15 Rb1 Be5 was given by Gawain Jones on *Chesspublishing.com* as "with good compensation in the shape of good squares for his remaining pieces and White's weak king".

11 ... Nd7

A perfectly playable alternative is 11 ... Ne8 12 h4 Na5 13 h5 Nc4 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 Qd3, X.Wemmers-K.Shiven, Amsterdam 2010.



Question: How does Black make headway here?

Answer: Black takes over by giving up the beloved Dragon bishop (!) for the c3-knight, the type of move that Dragon exponents abhor. However, in this instance, White's king has no good cover as a result.

After 15 ... Bxc3+! 16 bxc3 Qc8 17 Bd4 Bg4 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 Nd2 Rc7, Black has the better pawn structure and White's attack isn't going anywhere.

12 h4

Let's look at the alternatives:

a) On 12 Qd2, Black simply plays 12 ... Nc5!? 13 Nd4 (13 Nxc5 dxc5 14 Qxd8 Rfxd8 15 Bxc5 Nd4 leaves Black with more than sufficient compensation for the pawn) 13 ... Qa5 14 Nxe6 fxe6 15 Bg4 Nd8 and Black is doing very well.

b) 12 0-0 Nb6 13 Rf2 Nc4 (13 ... Qd7, preventing White from playing f4-f5 is also very good) 14 Bc1 b5 15 f5 Bd7 16 Nxb5 Nxb2 17 Qf1 Be5 18 Be3 Nb4 19 N5d4 Nxc2 20 Nxc2 Rxc2, and Black is a full

pawn up with the better position to boot, A.Lastin-Y.Yakovich, Elista 1995. I guess that's what happens when you play this line against one of the leading specialists on the White side.

12 ... Nb4

A possibly better move is 12 ... Nc5!?, something that can be easily forgotten when you look at the outcome of this game. Now for instance 13 Bf3 (White does win a pawn after 13 Nxc5 dxc5 14 Qxd8 Rfxd8 15 Bxc5, but then when 15 ... Nd4 hits the table, White has to hand it right back after 16 Bxd4 Bxd4 17 0-0-0 Be3+ 18 Kb1 Rxd1+ 19 Rxd1 Bxf4, and the pair of bishops along with the better pawn structure guarantees Black better chances) 13 ... Nb4 14 Qd2 Qb6 15 h5? (better is 15 Kf2!?) 15 ... Nxb3! 16 cxb3 (16 Bxb6 doesn't work because after 16 ... Nxd2, both White bishops are hanging and that is why the king should have gone to the f2-square on the previous move) 16 ... Nc2+! 17 Ke2 Nxe3 (17 ... Qa6+!? 18 Kf2 Nxa1 19 hxg6 fxg6 is even better for Black) 18 Qxe3 Qxe3+ 19 Kxe3 Bxc3 20 bxc3 Rxc3+ 21 Kf2 Rfc8, and Black was simply a pawn up with control over the only open file, D.Kononenko-K.Tarlev, Dnipropetrovsk 2003.

13 Nd4 Qa5 14 h5 Bc4

Another possibility is 14 ... Nc5 15 0-0 Bxd4 (this looks completely counterintuitive, but it turns out okay for Black) 16 Bxd4 Nc6 17 a3 Na4 18 Nxa4 Qxa4 19 c4 (19 c3 Bb3 20 Qd2 Nxd4 21 Qxd4 Qxd4+ 22 cxd4 Rc2 is of course better for Black) 19 ... Qxd1 20 Raxd1 Na5, and chances are about even.

15 a3?

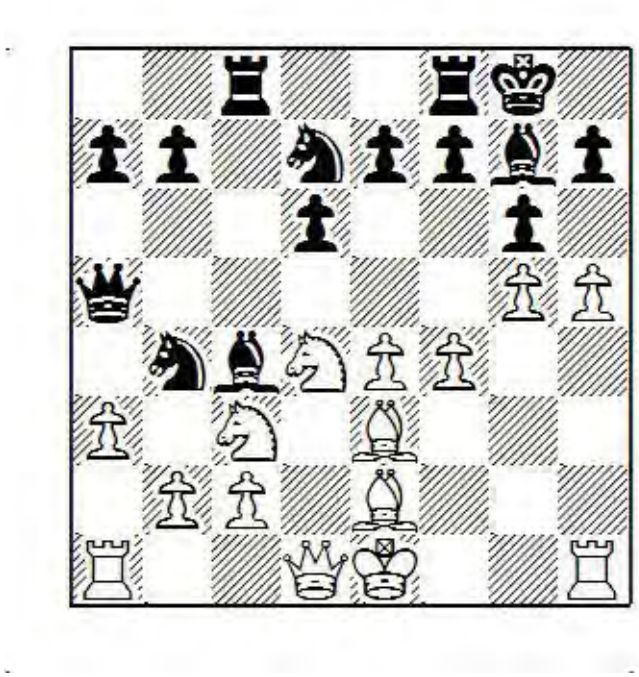
Unlikely as it might seem, this reflex 'kick' is the cause of White's problems.

Other choices are:

a) Instead, 15 hxg6 hxg6 16 Kf2 (or 16 Qd2 Rfe8 17 Kf2 Bxe2 18 Ndxe2 Na6 19 a3 Nc7 leaves chances about even as the black knights are heading for the c4- and e6-squares respectively) 16 ... Bxe2 17 Ndxe2 Nc5 18 a3 Nxe4+ 19 Nxe4 Nxc2 20 Rc1 Nxe3 21 Kxe3 d5 22 Nf2 Bxb2 and with the White king leading his forces into war, thus precariously placed, Black should be doing rather fine.

b) Also, after 15 0-0 Nb6 16 h6 Bh8 17 a3 Nc6 18 Nxc6 bxc6 19 Rf3 Bxc3 20 bxc3 Bxe2 21 Qxe2 Qxc3 22 Rb1 Qc4, Black is a pawn up for the time being and has the better pawn structure.

Let's go back to the stem game after 15 a3?.



Question: Black's knight is being ordered to 'vamoose' from the active b4-square. How does Black keep the initiative here?

Answer: **15 ... Na2!**

A stunner of a move that could well have taken White entirely by surprise. Black utilises the pin on the

c3-knight to keep queenside pressure. If not for this move, White's flagrant all-out kingside attacking policy might have reaped dividends.

16 Bxc4

White cannot trap the Black bishop after 16 Rxa2 Bxa2 because 17 b3 isn't an option. White's best is undoubtedly 16 hxg6, but here Black reaches a very good position after 16 ... hxg6 17 Bd2 Nxc3 18 Bxc3 Qb6 (Ward offers 18 ... Bxe2 19 Nxe2 Bxc3+ 20 Nxc3 Rxc3 21 bxc3 Qxc3+ 22 Kf2 Nc5 which is pretty ugly for White, who will have long term issues in terms of king defence) 19 Qd2 Bxe2 20 Nxe2 Bxc3 21 bxc3 Kg7 and the material balance remain intact, but Black's pawn structure and pieces are in far better shape than White's.

16 ... Nxc3 17 Qd3

A dreadful continuation is 17 bxc3? Qxc3+ 18 Kf2 Rxc4, as allowing the knight to survive enables it to continue along an amazing circuit.

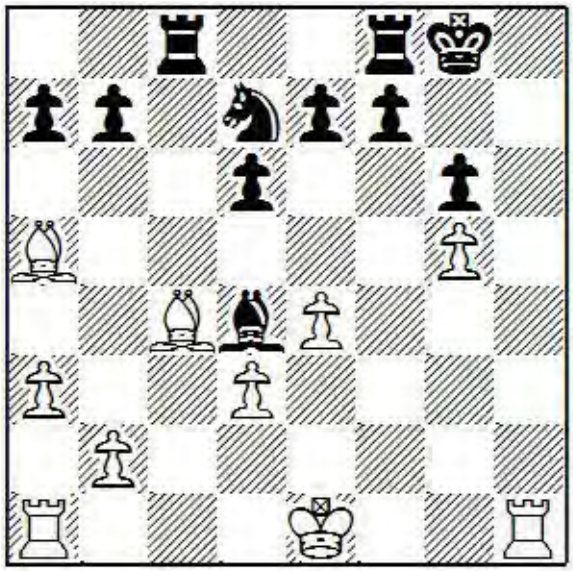
17 ... Nd5+!

Black nets a pawn with this discovered check idea while White is forced to trade queens,

18 Bd2 Nxf4

Oops! White might have missed the fact that once he played 15 a3, the Bd2 is pinned on account of the Qa5's presence.

19 Bxa5 Nxd3+ 20 cxd3 Bxd4 21 hxg6 hxg6



The complications are over with the net result that Black is a pawn up and has the compensation too, thanks to his better coordinated pieces.

22 Bc3

It would seem that 22 Rb1 now would be relatively best, but even that looks rather sombre as after 22 ... Ne5 23 Ke2 (23 b3 a6 is even worse) 23 ... Kg7, all possible threats on the kingside have been averted and Black should be winning without too much trouble.

22 ... Bxc3+ 23 bxc3 Ne5 24 Bd5 Rxc3 25 d4 Nf3+

Black's knights are unstoppable in this game.

26 Kf2 Nxg5

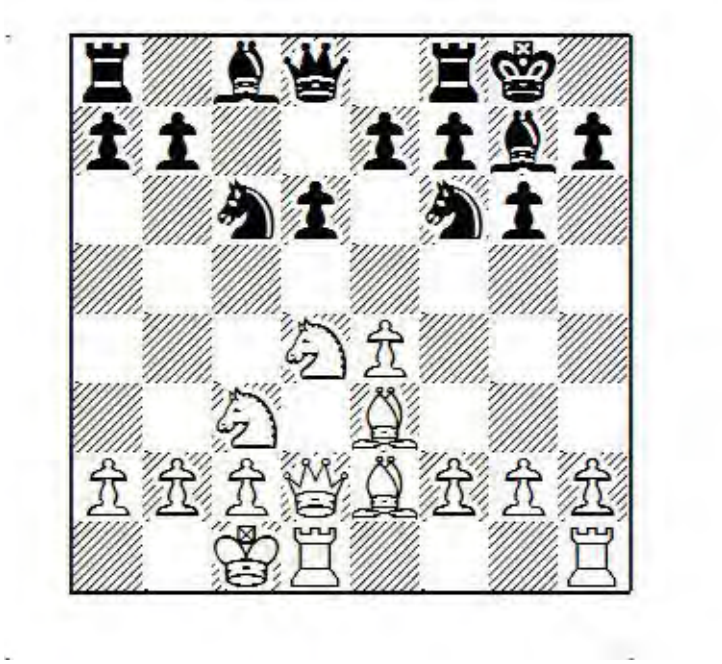
White could safely have resigned at this point, but for unknown reasons he decided to carry on.

27 Bxb7 Rb8 28 Rhb1 Ne6 0-1

Already being two pawns down and unable to prevent the loss of a third pawn, the Icelandic Grandmaster decided it was time to throw in the towel.

Game 7
A.Shirov-V.Topalov
Madrid 1996

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 Be2 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0



If White had castled kingside, we would have entered the lines covered in Dominguez Perez-Smerdon above.

Question: Is there any significant difference between this way of playing and the Yugoslav Dragon?

Answer: Firstly, let me assure you that White's position is not without venom and substituting f2-f3 with Be2 does have subtle differences. As pointed out by Emms and Palliser in *Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian*, after 9 ... 0-0 Bd7 10 h4, Black does well to reply 10 ... h5 or he might get routed quickly. For example, Emms analysed 10 ... Ne5 11 h5! Nfg4 12 f4! (an advantage of Be2 over f2-f3 is that f2-f4 can be played in one go!) 12 ... Nxe3 13 Qxe3 sees Black managing to trade off White's dark-squared bishop, but the cost in time is significant and White's attack remains undiminished. A fun line illustrating Black's difficulties is 13 ... Nc6 14 hxg6! hxg6 15 f5!? Ne5 16 Qh3 Re8 17 Ne6! fxe6 18 fxg6 and Black cannot escape mate (Emms). An excellent example of how to get clobbered in this line with Black.

On the flip side, Black has more choices in this line as by omitting f2-f3, White's e-pawn is undefended, allowing Black ... Qa5 options (as seen later in the stem game) which, as pointed out by Emms again, is not possible after 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6 11 Kb1 as 11 ... Qa5 runs into 12 Nd5! when 12 ... Qxd2 gets hit by the zwischenzug 13 Nxe7+, winning a clean pawn.

9 ... Nxd4

The principled continuation, since Black can get in ... Qa5.

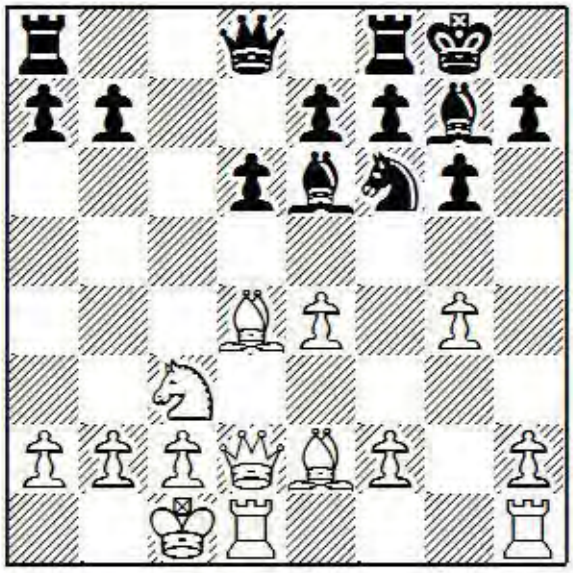
A perfectly acceptable alternative is 9 ... Ng4!? 10 Bxg4 Bxg4 11 f3 Be6 12 Kb1 Qa5 13 Nde2 Rfc8 14 Nd5 Bxd5 15 Qxd5?! (15 Qxa5 Nxa5 16 Rxd5 Nc4 17 Bc1 Rc6 is completely equal) 15 ... Qa6 16 Qd2?! (16 Qd3 b5 is also very nice for Black) 16 ... Bxb2! 17 Kxb2 Ne5 18 Ka1 Nc4 19 Qd3 Nxe3 20 Qxe3 Rxc2 21 Nc1 Rac8 22 Qb3 R8c3 23 Qb1 (23 Qb4 Qc6 24 Kb1 a5 25 Qxa5 Qc4, and White is completely tied up) 23 ... Rxg2!? (23 ... Qc4! 24 Nb3 Re3, and it is curtains for White) 24 Rd3 Qc4 25 Rhd1 Rgc2 and White called it quits, 0-1, B.Knezevic-E.Kahn, Budapest 1995.

10 Bxd4 Be6

Instead, 10 ... Qa5 will normally transpose to the main line.

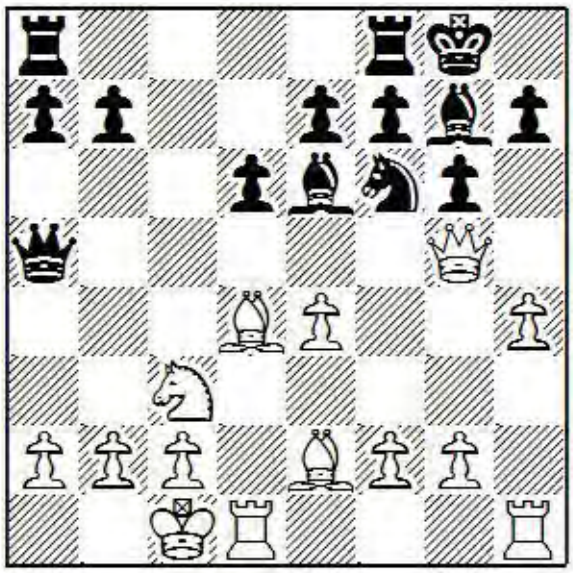
11 h4

There is also the interesting gambit 11 g4!?.



According to Tay in *CHESS, October 2015,* Black can accept the pawn but has to consider giving up the exchange at the appropriate time after 11 ... Nxg4 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 f4 Nf6! 14 Rhg1!? (Black should hold too after 14 f5 Bd7 15 h4 Qa5 16 Rdg1 Bc6 17 Bd3 Rh8 18 a3 Rag8 19 h5 Qc5! or 14 h4 Rc8 15 h5 Qa5 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 Rdg1 Rxc3 18 bxc3 Nxe4 19 Qd4+ Nf6 20 Bd3 Bf5 with equal chances) 14 ... Rc8! 15 f5 Bd7 16 h4 Qa5 17 h5 Rxc3! 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 bxc3 Rc8 with mutual chances though Black has the easier game (Tay).

11 ... Qa5 12 Qg5



12 ... b5!?

Question: Is the situation so critical that Black must sacrifice a pawn here?

Answer: Rather than heading for a middlegame without queens, Topalov, true to his nature, seeks active counterplay, even at the cost of a pawn. Trading queens here probably does not leave Black with chances to win, especially at the top level. In fact, the way Shirov played to defuse the Black queenside counterplay subsequently showed that Black's open lines there cannot be underestimated.

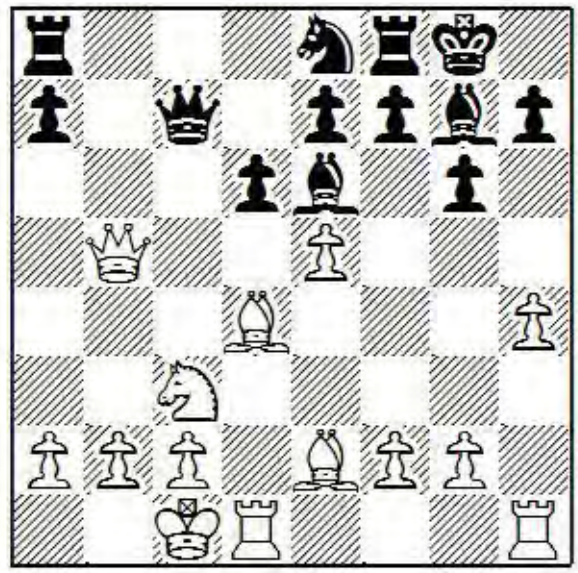
The alternative 12 ... Qxg5+ leaves White with a little initiative, but objectively speaking the chances are about even after 13 hxg5 Nd7 14 Nd5 (14 Bxg7 Kxg7 is equal) 14 ... Bxd5 15 exd5 Bxd4 16 Rxd4

Kg7 17 Re4 Rfe8 18 Bb5 Rad8 19 Reh4 Rh8 and Black is fine, T.Nabaty-E.Can, Chotowa 2010.

13 Qxb5 Qc7 14 e5

The computer likes 14 h5, but Shirov probably preferred to avoid to facing a Black initiative against his own king after 14 ... Rfc8 15 hxg6 hxg6 followed by ... Rab8.

14 ... Ne8!



The natural 14 ... Rfb8!? doesn't work for Black as after 15 exd6 exd6 16 Qg5 Rb4 17 Nb5 Qa5 18 Bxf6 h6 19 Bxg7 hxg5 20 Bc3 Rc8 21 a3 Rxc3 22 axb4 Qa1+ 23 Kd2 Rxc2+ 24 Kxc2 Qa4+ 25 Kd2 Qxb4+ 26 Kc1, White having the clearly better of this complicated position.

Black can also consider 14 ... a6!? 15 Qb6 Qxb6 16 Bxb6 dxe5 with an unbalanced and interesting queenless middlegame.

15 exd6 Nxd6 16 Qc5

Signalling the beginning of a major series of exchanges, which leads straight to an ending.

A better way to challenge Black's game plan would have been16 Qa4!?.

16 ... Qxc5 17 Bxc5 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Rfc8 19 Bxd6 exd6 20 Rxd6 Rxc3 21 h5

There is no real chance for any kind of advantage. For instance, 21 Bd3 Ra3 22 Ra6 Rxa2 23 Rxa2 Bxa2 24 Kb2 Be6 is also completely equal.

21 ... Rc5 22 Kb2 Rf5

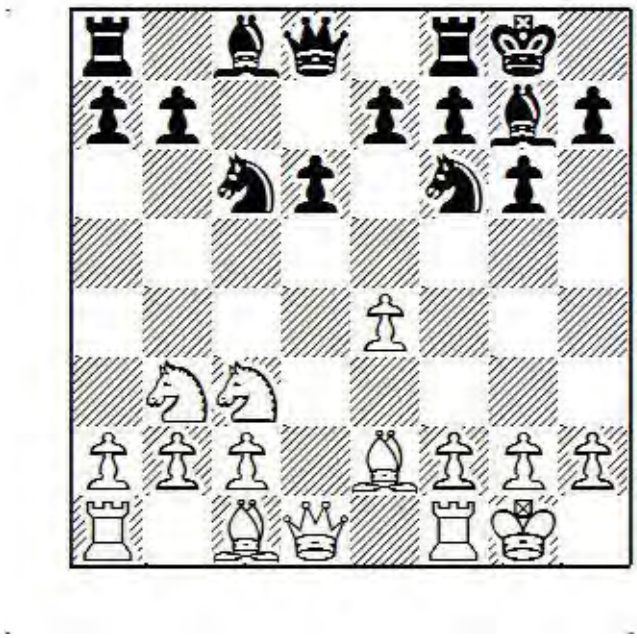
A drawn ending will result after 22 ... Rb8+ 23 Kc1 Bxa2 24 Kd2 Bc4.

23 Rb1?! ½-½

And here, quite prematurely, the players agreed to a draw. A possible continuation was 23 ... Rxf2 24 Bf3 Rc8 25 Rc6 Rxc6 26 Bxc6 gxh5, and Black can continue on for a while.

Chapter Two
Classical Dragon: Main Line – 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nb3 0-0

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nb3 0-0



If White is not ready to enter the madness that the Yugoslav Attack can easily be, then the Classical Main Lines can be a reasonable refuge.

The more interesting option is the so-called Karpov Variation that involves White playing 9 Bg5 (instead of 9 Be3). White will attempt to set up a positional clamp on Black's centre with Re1 and Nd5. Black has to respond more carefully in this particular line, but ultimately should be fine here as well. In Games 8 and 9, White tests this option with Black answering with 9 ... a6 and 9 ... Be6 respectively. Before moving on to the pure main line (with 9 Be3), there are another couple of options. The positional 9 Re1, which we examine in Game 10 and the prophylactic-looking 9 Kh1, which is the subject of Game 11.

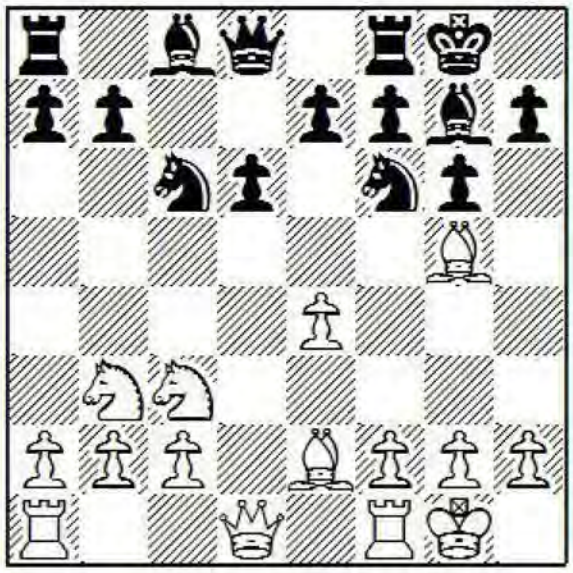
The majority of the Classical lines (where White plays Be3 and f2-f4) are well-established but are also largely considered harmless for Black, at least theoretically. White does not pretend to seek a large advantage, but rather accepts playable position, where he with understanding and skill can outplay his opponent without taking huge risks. Black of course is not without chances in these lines either. In Game 12, the future World Champion Magnus Carlsen shows that 9 ... a6 is a worthwhile alternative to normal 9 ... Be6. Moving on to 9 ... Be6 10 f4, we examine the old-fashioned 10 ... Qc8 in Game 13 and 10 ... Na5 in Game 14. Nowadays the third major option, 10 ... Rc8, is the most popular one, this is examined in detail in the last game of the chapter.

Game 8
S.Ganguly-S.Narayanan
Moscow 2013

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Bg5

The 'normal' move order to enter the Karpov Variation is with 8 Nb3 Nc6 9 Bg5, but as we will see in this chapter, there are many possible transpositions between the various lines.

8 ... Nc6 9 Nb3



This is the starting position of the Karpov Variation, which basically has become the main line of the Classical Dragon as well as in most people's opinion, the only line in the Classical Dragon to really bother Black in any significant way. Ideally White wants to play f2-f4, Bf3, Re1 and Nd5 and put a clamp on Black's position. If Black isn't careful, this can become difficult to wrestle your way out of.

9 ... a6

The main alternative is 9 ... Be6 which is featured in our next main game.

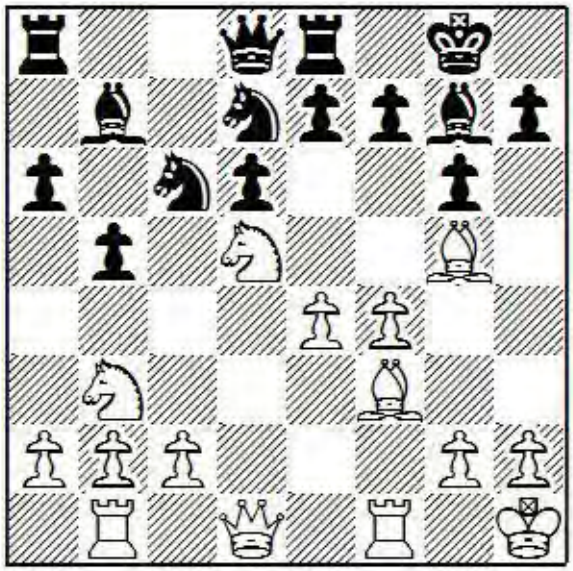
10 Re1

This is the solid methodical approach to shut down Black's game. White will retreat the bishop to f1 and follow up with Nd5. Black is discouraged from trading on d5 as the e-file will be opened to White's advantage. The alternatives are played more frequently but are hardly any better:

a) 10 a4 Be6 11 Kh1 Na5 12 Nd4 Bc4 13 Bxc4 Nxc4 14 b3 Na5 (14 ... Nb6!? 15 f4 Nbd7 16 Qf3 Rc8 looks like a good alternative for Black) 15 Qd2 (15 Nd5!? e6 16 Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 Qd2 Rfd8 is about even as well) 15 ... Rc8 16 f3 Nc6 17 Nde2 Qa5 18 Rad1 Rfe8 19 Bxf6 Bxf6 20 Nd5 Bg7 and Black has equalised, Bu Xiangzhi-V.Malakhov, Sochi 2009.

b) 10 f4 b5 11 Bf3 and here, Black has two good choices:

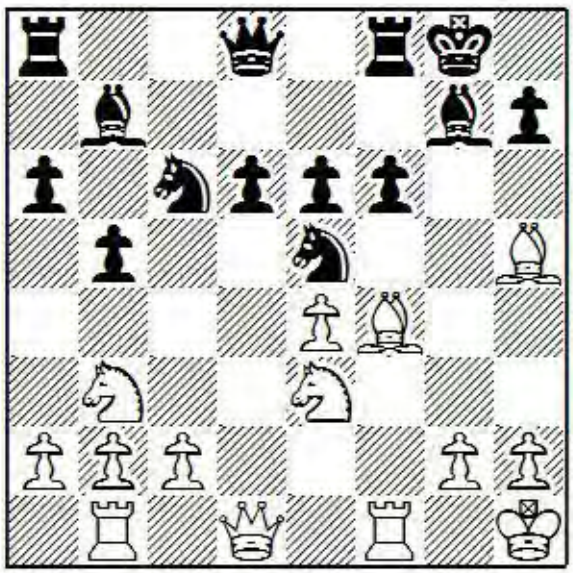
b1) 11 ... Bb7!? 12 Kh1 Nd7 13 Rb1 Re8 14 Nd5



This is an interesting position to discuss. White looks as if he has achieved what he set out to do and Black seemingly has to accept weakening his pawn structure in order to ward off the pressure.

Question: How does GM Svidler deal with this? To be fair, his choice would be very tough to find but it does illustrates his extremely good feel for the Sicilian defence.

Answer: Svidler pushed the white pieces back by compromising his pawn structure with 14 ... f6! (the knight is first to be evicted)15 Bh4 e6 16 Ne3 g5! (now the bishop's turn to be shooed away) 17 Bg3 gxf4 (annexing the e5-square for a knight outpost) 18 Bxf4 Nde5 19 Bh5 Rf8 with a complicated position.



Black's position is very flexible despite its odd appearance and fluffy pawn structure, M.Apicella-P.Svidler, Yerevan 1996. In fact, Svidler considered this position slightly advantageous for Black.

b2) 11 ... b4 and White has a few options:

b21) 12 Nd5 seems to be in line with what White wants to accomplish anyway, but as it happens, Black can be pleased with the outcome anyway after 12 ... Nxd5 13 exd5 Na5 14 Qe1 Qb6+ (this check is why White often tries to tuck the king in the corner before initiating any kind of central action) 15 Kh1 Nc4 (Black could take the b2-pawn right away, but this is even stronger) 16 Qxe7 Ne3! 17 f5 (the white queen needs breathing space and this becomes evident if White chooses to ignore the danger after 17 Rg1

Ra7! 18 Qe4 Bf5 and the queen is trapped) 17 ... Nxf5 18 Qe1 Bd7 (Black can also consider 18 ... Bxb2 19 Rb1 Bc3 and White has no compensation for the pawn) 19 g4 Rfe8 20 Qd2 Ne3 21 Qf2 Nc4 22 Qxb6 Nxb6 23 Nd2 Bb5 and Black is clearly better, S.Kaplan-A.Khalifman, Dresden 2007.

b22) As it turns out, 12 Na4 may be better, but even so, Black is fine after 12 ... Bd7 13 Rf2 Qc7 14 a3 Rab8 15 axb4 Nxb4 16 c3 Nc6 17 Nd4 Na5 18 f5 Nc4 19 b3 Ne5, J.Gallagher-C.Ward, London 1988.

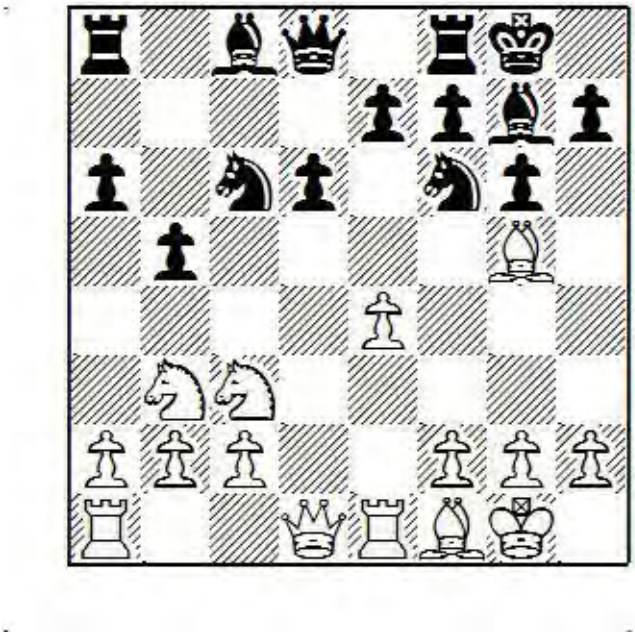
b23) Finally, after 12 Ne2?! Qb6+! 13 Kh1 (of course not 13 Ned4?? e5) 13 ... Ng4 14 Qe1 Ne3 15 Qf2 Rb8 16 Rg1 Bxb2 17 Rab1 Bg7, Black is just a pawn up and White doesn't have a shadow of compensation for it, M.Apicella-M.Santo Roman, Clichy 1993.

10 ... b5

One plan against the early Re1 system is ... a7-a5 (threatening ... a5-a4) and only after White responds with a2-a4, does Black play ... Be6, bringing into play the concept of ... Bxb3 and then ... e7-e6 and ... d6-d5. This concept is discussed in Game 10 (though without White playing Bg5). Of course now that would look ridiculous when Black has already used up a tempo with the a-pawn and thus the best way to put the last move to good use is with the text b-pawn advance.

11 Bf1

Clearing the e-file for the rook to exert pressure.



11 ... Bb7

Question: Is 11 ... h6 worth considering or does it merely weaken the Black kingside?

Answer: It is often worthwhile to insert 11 ... h6 when possible, because after 12 Bh4, Black has the possibility of playing ... g6-g5 if there is a need to alleviate the pressure on the h4-d8 diagonal. Moreover, White is not well-placed for a kingside attack to take advantage of the black kingside pawn 'weaknesses'.

In this position, Black has tried:

a) 12 ... Nd7 13 Rb1 Nde5 14 Nd5 g5 15 Bg3 e6 16 Ne3 Bb7 17 Qd2 (17 c4 bxc4 18 Nxc4 Nxc4 19 Bxc4 Ne5 with pleasant position for Black, A.Sokolov-P.Svidler, Germany 2002) 17 ... Qc7 18 f3 Rad8 19 c3 Ne7 20 Nd4, M.Apicella-R.Mamedov, Aix-les-Bains 2011 and after 20 ... d5 21 exd5 Nxd5, Black's position looks very comfortable.

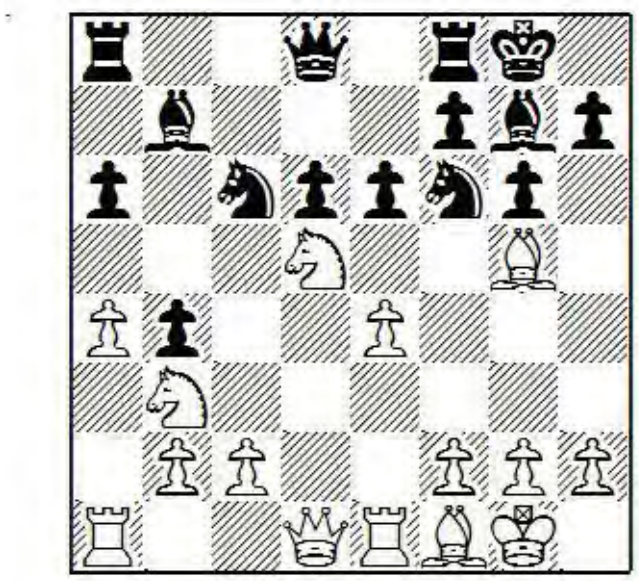
b) 12 ... Bb7 13 a4 b4 14 Nd5 was played in J.Mullon-H.Hamdouchi, Pau 2012 and now Black has an interesting possibility in 14 ... Nxd5 15 exd5 Ne5 16 f4 when White wins a pawn but Black obtains excellent compensation after 16 ... Nd7 17 Bxe7 Qb6+ 18 Kh1 Rfe8 19 Rb1 Rac8 20 Qd2 Nc5 and Black may even have the better chances.

12 a4 b4

Just like on the previous move, Black can consider 12 ... h6!?, questioning the white bishop. 13 Bd2

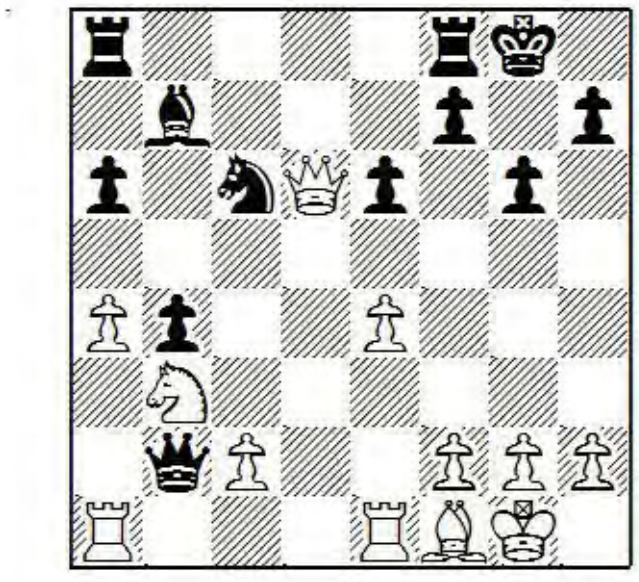
(13 Bh4 b4 14 Nd5 can transpose to the line above) 13 ... b4 14 Nd5 e6 15 Nxf6+ Qxf6, and Black shouldn't have any problems.

13 Nd5 e6?!



This looks like a perfectly reasonable move. The simplification that follows, however, is, as we will see, to White's advantage. The alternative is 13 ... Nd7 14 Qc1 Qb8 15 Rd1 (White doesn't achieve anything with 15 Nxe7+ Nxe7 16 Bxe7 Re8 17 Bh4 Rxe4 18 Bg3 Qc7 and Black's pieces have come back to life, with his activity compensating for the weaker pawn structure) 15 ... Re8 16 f3 e6 17 Ne3 Nde5 18 Rb1 Qc7 with a solid and playable position for Black.

14 Nxf6+ Bxf6 15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 Qxd6 Qxb2



Question: Is it safe to assume that Black is doing quite well?

Answer: It does look like at first glance as if Black has accomplished something here, White's pawns on the queenside are now both isolated and Black's pieces look harmonious. Unfortunately it isn't as rosy as that. For starters, White has Nc5, which will cause Black major issues. White's subsequent central and queenside activity is not easy to ward off.

17 Nc5 Rad8

The only move for Black to avoid immediate material loss. The alternatives 17 ... Na5? 18 Qb6 and 17 ... Nd8? 18 Nd7 immediately end the fun for Black.

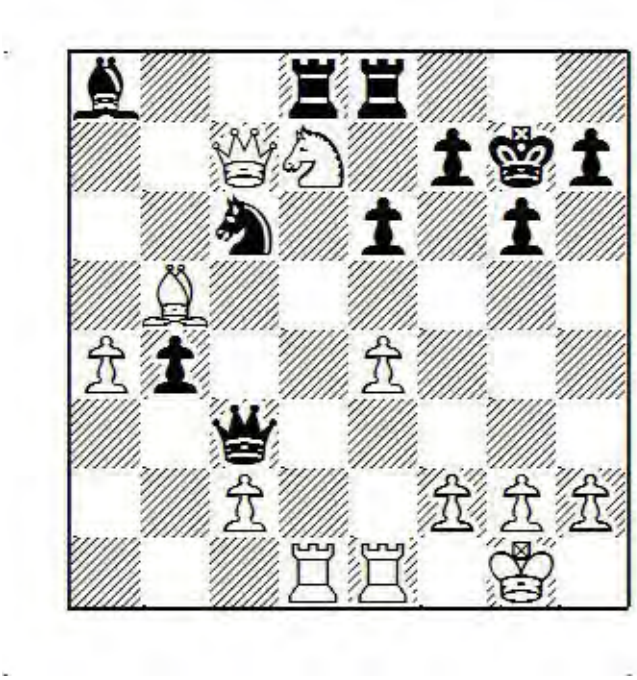
18 Qc7 Ba8 19 Nd7!

Taking the pawn with 19 Bxa6 allows Black to get active counterplay with 19 ... Rd2 20 Bd3 Qc3 21 Qf4 Nd4 and Black has ample compensation for the pawn.

19 ... Rfe8 20 Bxa6?!

White gets a little materialistic though it is hard to fault him for that. But 20 Rad1, activating the rook and putting more pressure on Black's position, appears to be somewhat better. For instance, after 20 ... Kg7 21 Re2 e5 22 Red2 Qc3 23 Qb6, White will win the a6-pawn eventually, but while keeping a controlled hold on the position.

20 ... Qc3 21 Rad1 Kg7 22 Bb5



22 ... Rxd7??

A dreadful blunder from Black, apparently played in response to the threat of Nb6 where it seems all of Black's pieces are either threatened or pinned. However, it is not nearly as bad as Black's reaction will lead us to believe. With 22 ... e5!:

a) Now the feared 23 Nb6?? is a massive mistake on account of 23 ... Re7! and the queen is trapped.

b) 23 Qd6!? Re6 24 Qc5 (24 Qc7 Ree8 repeats the position) 24 ... Nd4 25 Qxc3 bxc3 26 Nc5 Red6 27 Rc1 Rc8 28 Nd3 f6 and despite his extra pawn, White will have a hard time making any kind of progress due to Black's far more active pieces.

c) 23 f3 Rc8 24 Qb6 Re6 25 Qf2 Nd4 and Black is doing fine.

23 Qxd7 Rd8 24 Qc7

White obviously cannot take on d8 because it leaves the e1-rook unprotected.

24 ... e5

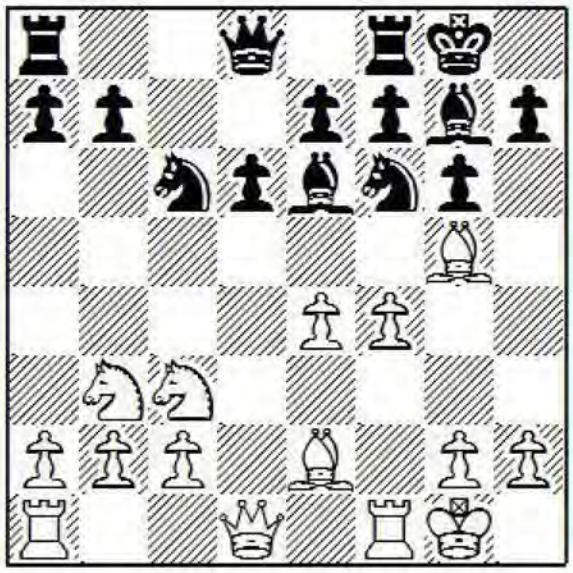
Also insufficient is 24 ... Rxd1 25 Rxd1 Qxc2 26 Rd7, and with the bishop providing the needed cover to the back rank, the queen and rook has the cover they need to inflict pain on Black's king.

25 Bxc6 Rxd1 26 Rxd1 Bxc6 27 a5 Kh6 28 Qd6 1-0

With the threat of Qd2+ and the queen exchange looming, Black decided to call it a day.

Game 9
A.Morozevich-V.Ivanchuk
Russian Team Championships, Dagomys 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Be2 Bg7 6 Nb3 d6 7 0-0 Nf6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Bg5 Be6 10 f4?!



This is a strange decision. While Morozevich certainly is known for his inventive opening play, he usually doesn't play outright bad moves, and this move certainly doesn't qualify as good. Morozevich would certainly have known about this.

The primary alternative is 10 Kh1, first tucking the king away in the corner to avoid pesky queen checks from b6, something that we will see can be an issue for White in this variation. Also, 10 Re1 transposes to Game 10.

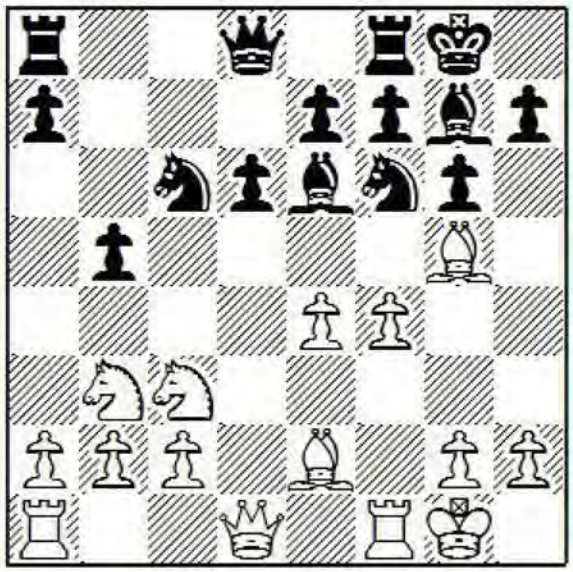
Now there are several choices available to Black, some of which are:

a) Black can challenge the knight and the white queenside outright with 10 ... a5!? when White usually will have to respond in the same fashion with 11 a4, weakening the b4-square. A good illustration how Black should use his forces to take advantage of these weaknesses went 11 ... Qc8 (a dual-purpose move as we will see) 12 f4 Rd8 13 Bf3 Nb4 14 Nd4 Bc4 15 Be2 h6 16 Bh4?! e5! (I think White may have overlooked this move) 17 Ndb5 exf4 18 Bxc4 Qxc4 19 Bxf6 Bxf6 20 Rxf4 Be5 and Black's pieces are better coordinated and dominate White's somewhat scattered forces, J.Cubas-S.Tiviakov, Tromso 2014.

b) 10 ... Na5 11 f4 Nc4 12 f5 Nxb2 13 Qc1 Bc4 14 fxg6 was played in M.Leon Hoyos-A.Fier, Beijing 2008, and now Black could have claimed the better chances with 14 ... fxg6! 15 Qxb2 Bxe2 16 Nxe2 Nxe4 17 Nbd4 (17 Qc1 Rxf1+ 18 Qxf1 Bxa1, and with the bishop unprotected on g5, Black ends up with more wood) 17 ... Nxg5 18 Rxf8+ Qxf8, and although White will get at least one of his pawns back, the one on b7, Black is clearly better thanks to his bishop and slightly better coordinated pieces.

c) 10 ... Rc8 11 f4 a6 12 Bf3 (12 a4 Na5 13 f5 Bxb3 14 cxb3 Rxc3!? (14 ... Qb6!? may be even better) 15 Bxf6 Rxb3 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Bc4 Rb4 18 Bd5 Qb6 definitely doesn't represent any problems for Black R.Kasimdzhanov-V.Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee (blitz) 1999) 12 ... Bc4 13 Rf2 b5 14 Rd2 Qc7 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 Na5 17 c3 Nxb3 18 Qxb3 Qd7 19 a4 Rc4 20 axb5 axb5 and objectively speaking the chances are probably about equal, but while White has the pair of bishops the white pawns seem loose somehow, A.Danin-J.Chabanon, Cappelle-la-Grande 2014.

10 ... b5!



Question: How can Black play this move? It looks like White can capture in several ways.

Answer: It is not a pawn sacrifice, because White cannot take it without losing his e-pawn since 11 Nxb5 is met by 11 ... Nxe4 and 11 Bxb5 runs into 11 ... Qb6+ with 12 ... Nxe4 to follow. We will cover the actual variations below but the gist is Black's queenside play is accelerated as a result of White not being able to take advantage of this flank charge.

11 a3?!

Obviously played to stop Black from playing ... b5-b4, poking at the knight. This cannot have been Morozevich's big idea either. Other tries are:

a) 11 Bxb5 is met with 11 ... Qb6+ 12 Kh1 Nxe4 regaining the pawn with the better chances. For instance, 13 Bxc6 Qxc6 (13 ... Nxc3 is less effective, but also playable. Gawain Jones now offers 14 Qf3! Rac8 15 Bxe7 Rxc6 16 Bxf8 Kxf8 17 bxc3 Rxc3 18 Qd1 Re3 19 Rb1 Bc3 and with his bishop pair and active pieces, Black has excellent compensation for the exchange) 14 Na5 (both 14 Bxe7 Nxc3 15 bxc3 Bd5!; and 14 Nxe4 Qxe4 15 Bxe7 Rfc8 leave Black clearly better according to Jones) 14 ... Nxc3 (if Black tries to avoid the trade with 14 ... Qb6!? 15 Nxe4 f6, White may be better after 16 Qe1 fxg5 17 Nxg5 Bf5 18 Nc4) 15 Nxc6 Nxd1 16 Nxe7+ Kh8 17 Raxd1 Bxb2 is evaluated as equal by Jones, but I prefer Black's chances with the bishop pair.

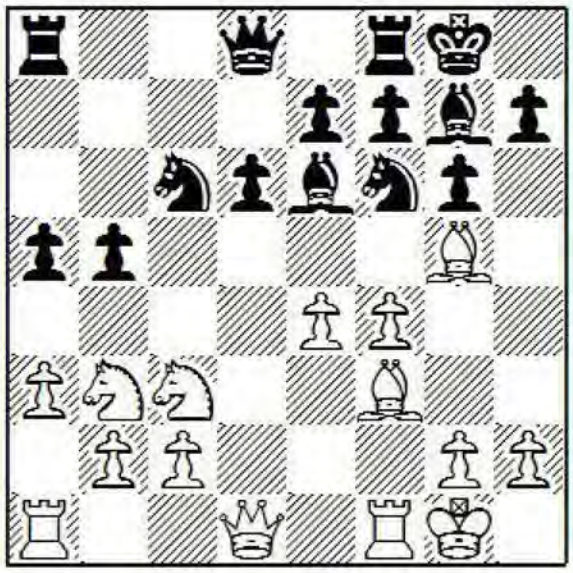
b) 11 Bf3 Nd7!? (11 ... b4 is also playable) 12 Kh1 b4 13 Ne2 Rc8 14 Nbd4 Nxd4 15 Nxd4 Bc4 16 Rf2 Qb6 17 Rd2 Rfe8 and Black is clearly in control of the game, O.Loskutov-M.Sher, St Petersburg 1996.

c) 11 f5 looks logical and after 11 ... Bxb3 (also 11 ... Qb6+ 12 Kh1 Bc4 is worth a try) 12 axb3 (12 cxb3 makes less sense after 12 ... b4 13 Bxf6 Bxf6 14 Na4 Qa5 and Black is better as the a4-knight is not a happy camper, Wang Yu-Gu Xiaobing, Tehran 2007) 12 ... b4 13 Nd5 Nxe4 14 Bb5 (14 Bh4!? is a better try) 14 ... Nxg5 15 Bxc6 Rc8 16 Rxa7 Rxc6 17 Nxe7+ Kh8 18 Nxc6 Qb6+ 19 Kh1 Qxc6 20 f6 Bh6 21 Qd2 Qc5 22 Rb7 Rc8 (22 ... Nh3!? 23 Qe1 (of course not 23 Qxh6?? Qg1+!! with mate) 23 ... Qxc2 with an unclear position according to Jones) 23 Rxb4 Ne6, a complicated position with mutual chances arises.

11 ... a5

As we have discussed above, the b5-pawn really isn't hanging, so this move is the consistent follow-up, grabbing the initiative.

12 Bf3



White prepares to meet ... b5-b4 with an eventual Nd5.

If instead 12 Kh1 b4:

a) 13 Nd5, Jones offers a nice bit of analysis that well illustrates Black's superiority with 13 ... a4!? (13 ... Nxe4 is also be good for Black and 14 Bb5 Nxg5 15 Bxc6 Rc8 16 Nxa5 is given as unclear by Jones, but after 16 ... Bxd5 17 Qxd5 Bxb2 18 Ra2 bxa3 19 fxg5 e6 20 Qb5 Qc7 (followed by ... Bc3 winning the piece back), Black is better) 14 Bxf6 (14 Bb5?! axb3 15 Bxc6 Rc8 16 Nxb4 Qb6 17 e5 Rxc6 18 cxb3 dxe5 19 Nxc6 Qxc6 20 fxe5 Ng4 and Black's minor pieces trump the rook and pawns) 14 ... exf6 15 Bb5 (15 Nd2 f5 is better for Black) 15 ... Bxd5 16 exd5 Ne7 17 Nd4 f5 and White is having issues with his loose pieces and in particular, the queenside pawns. For instance, 18 axb4 Qb6 19 Nc6 Nxc6 20 Bxc6 Bxb2! 21 Ra2 (21 Rxa4 Rxa4 22 Bxa4 Qxb4 can only be better for Black) 21 ... Qxb4! 22 Bxa8 Rxa8 and Black's a-pawn is very problematic for White.

b) 13 axb4?! axb4 14 Rxa8 Qxa8 15 Nd5 Bxd5 (as pointed out by Jones, Black is clearly better after 15 ... Nxe4 16 Bf3 Bxd5 17 Qxd5 Nxg5 18 fxg5 Rc8 19 Be4 e6 20 Qxd6 Bxb2 when 21 Qd7 is parried with 21 ... Ne5! and Black is actually even winning) 16 exd5 Na5 17 Bf3 Nxb3 18 cxb3 Rc8 19 Re1 Rc7 20 Qd2 Qa5 with roughly equal chances, D.Bondoc-C.Spulber, Eforie Nord 1997.

12 ... a4

Another consistent follow-up move though 12 ... Rc8 is also good.

13 Nc1

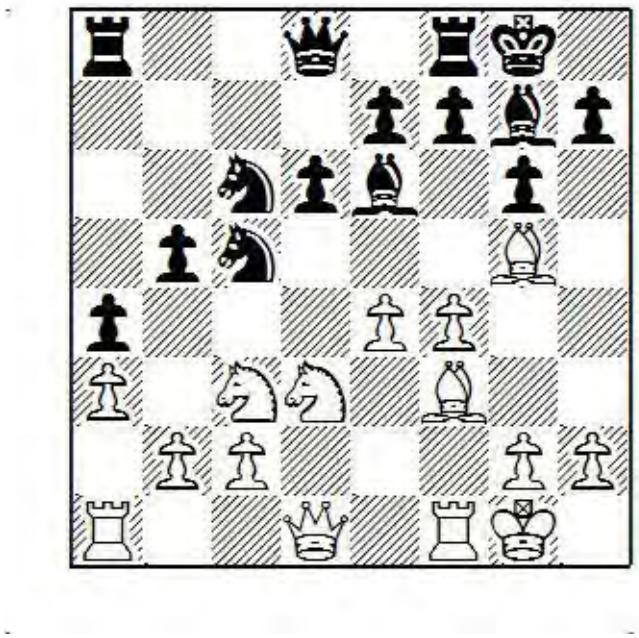
White intends to send the knight to d3, helping to contain Black on the queenside as well as possibly supporting pawn advances such as e4-e5 and f4-f5. The alternative 13 Nd2 on the other hand, looks passive and appears to hand over key squares to Black after 13 ... h6 (or immediately 13 ... Nd4!?) 14 Bh4 (White does not win a piece with 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 e5? as it is simply met by 15 ... Qb6+ 16 Kh1 dxe5) 14 ... Nd4 15 Bf2 Nxf3+ 16 Qxf3 Ng4 17 f5 Nxf2 18 Qxf2 (18 fxe6? fxe6 19 Qe2 Qb6 is for obvious reasons not a good idea for White) 18 ... Bd7 followed by ... Rc8 and Black has the better chances thanks to his lovely pair of bishops.

13 ... Nd7 14 Nd3

Not 14 Nxb5? due to 14 ... Bc4.

14 ... Nc5

Also, 14 ... Nd4 followed by ... Bc4, looks attractive as well.



15 Kh1

It is not easy to suggest a workable plan for White here. It would seem logical to challenge Black's knights, but Black appears to keep the edge, for example after:

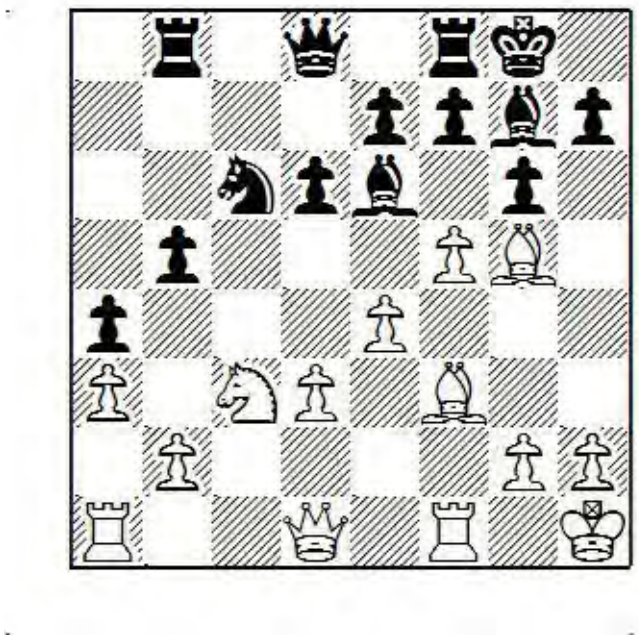
a) 15 Nb4 Nxb4 16 axb4 Na6 17 e5 Rb8 and White's b-pawn is quite vulnerable.

b) 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 Qb6!? 17 Kh1 Nd4 18 Bxe7 Rfc8! 19 Bg5 (White has to be careful that this bishop doesn't get trapped after a ... Nf5 hit) 19 ... Nxd3 20 Qxd3 Rxc2, and Black is controlling the board.

15 ... Nxd3 16 cxd3 Rb8

Again, 16 ... h6!? 17 Bh4 Nd4 (Jones) comes to mind as an attractive alternative.

17 f5



Question: It looks like the momentum of the game has changed. Is White now better?

Answer: No, nothing has changed. White has to play aggressively in order not to end up with a sad passive position. Although the text move also opens up a path for the g5-bishop (which was otherwise without purpose on that square), on the other hand, now the f3-bishop looks little more than a tall pawn.

17 ... Bb3 18 Qd2 b4 19 axb4 Rxb4

It would appear that recapturing with the b4-knight and stopping White from playing Bh6 (as in the game) due to the loose pawn on d3 would make more sense but 19 ... Nxb4 20 Bd1! (getting rid of the terrible-looking f3-bishop) may actually leave White with pretty decent chances of an advantage.

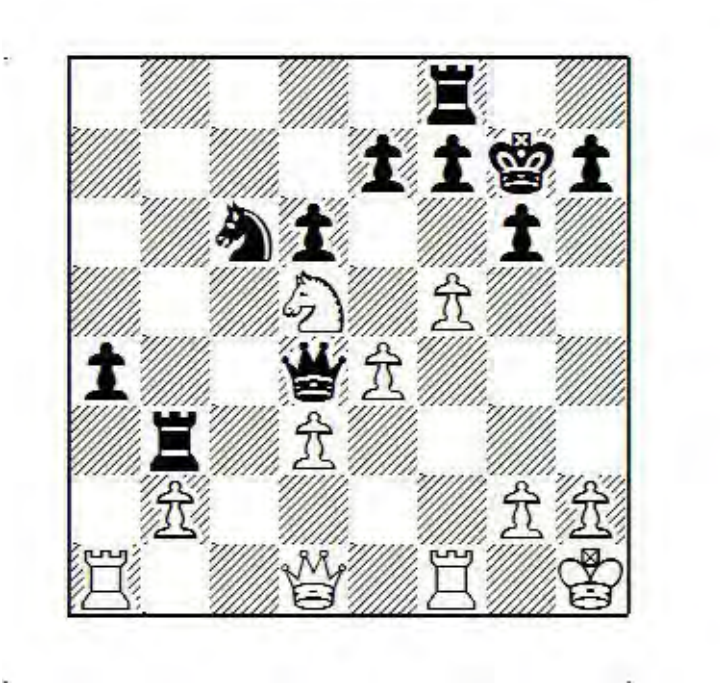
20 Bh6 Qb6 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Bd1

As mentioned above, this is an excellent way of getting the bad bishop exchanged. Now White threatens to take the a4-pawn, forcing Black's response.

22 ... Bxd1 23 Qxd1 Qd4

Wonderfully dominating on the dark squares after the departure of the bishops.

24 Nd5 Rb3



25 Qc1?

Now White starts getting himself into trouble. As Jones pointed out in his annotations to the game, 25 Nxe7! is the critical move and after 25 ... Nxe7 (25 ... Rxd3?! 26 Qc1 is not the way to go for Black) 26 f6+ Kg8 27 Qc1! (27 fxe7 Re8 regains the piece but leaves Black better thanks to his active pieces) 27 ... Qxb2! 28 fxe7 (28 Qh6 looks lethal, but after 28 ... Nf5! 29 exf5 Qxf6 30 fxg6 Qxg6 31 Qc1 Rb4, Black is a bit better despite his airy king position) 28 ... Re8 29 Qc6 Rxe7 30 Qxd6 and now Black's safest option is probably 30 ... Qe5 31 Qxe5 Rxe5 32 Rxa4 Rxd3 33 Ra8+ Kg7 34 Ra7 Kh6!, leading to a drawn ending.

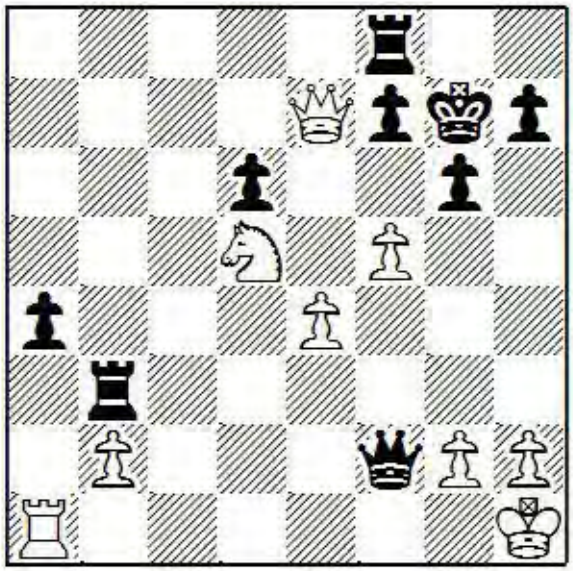
25 ... Ne5 26 Qc7?

Very optimistic but not very good. Let's look at the alternatives:

a) Now 26 Nxe7 doesn't work all that well because after 26 ... Nxd3 27 f6+ Qxf6! 28 Rxf6 Nxc1 29 Rxd6 Re8 30 Nc6 Nd3 31 Rxa4 Rxb2 32 h3 Nf2+, Black has an extra pawn but not all of us will have the technique to convert this kind of advantage.

b) 26 fxg6 is relatively best. After 26 ... Nxd3! (26 ... hxg6 27 Nxe7 Nxd3 also looks attractive, but runs into 28 Qg5 with a nasty f5-check threat, which is enough to get White the draw) 27 Qg5 h6! 28 Qg3 (28 Nxe7 hxg5 29 Nf5+ Kxg6 30 Nxd4 Rb4 31 Nf5 Rxe4 32 Nxd6 Rb4 gives Black excellent winning chances) 28 ... Ne5 (threatening the queen) 29 Qf4 Nxg6 30 Qg4 Kh7, Black is regaining control over the action and is a pawn up.

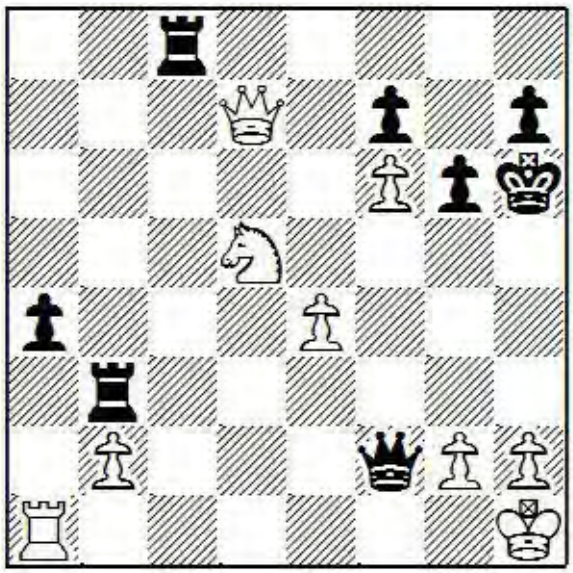
26 ... Nxd3 27 Qxe7 Nf2+ 28 Rxf2 Qxf2



The combination of queen, knight and weak dark squares around the king looks pretty scary for Black. However, Ivanchuk has worked it out and is not worried.

29 Qxd6 Rc8 30 f6+ Kh6 31 Qd7

Considering what happens over the next several moves it is safe to assume that Ivanchuk was in one of his unbelievable time troubles, and either Morozevich joined him in time trouble or just played fast as well to try to take advantage of Ivanchuk's situation. Whatever the situation, the rest of the game is hardly model play.



31 ... Rxb2?

Simply 31 ... Qxb2 32 Rg1 Rc1 is game over for White.

32 Qg4?

White does better with 32 Qh3+ Kg5 33 Ne3, but Black is still winning after 33 ... Qf4 34 Qxc8 Qxe3.

32 ... Rcc2?

Another simpler win is 32 ... Rcb8.

33 Nf4?

Stronger is 33 Ne3! as the knight is taboo due to Qh4 mate. However, 33 ... Qxf6 34 e5 Qxe5 35 Nxc2 Rxc2 36 Qxa4 is still better for Black, though the win is now very far off.

33 ... a3

Relatively better is 33 ... Rb3! but the text move still wins.

34 h4

Things are getting increasingly trickier. Had Black played 33 ... Rb3, he could now have decided the game with 34 ... Qg3.

34 ... Rb5?

The way to win is 34 ... Qc5! and this also keeps the king safe. Now 35 Rxa3 (35 Nd5 Rxg2 36 Qxg2 Rxg2 37 Kxg2 Qd4 is an easy win for Black) 35 ... Qe5 36 Rg3 Qxf6 is winning for Black.

35 Rxa3?

Instead, after 35 Nd5 Rxd5 36 exd5 Qxf6 37 Rxa3, I doubt the win is around the corner any time soon.

35 ... Qd4!

Black is winning again.

36 Nd5? Rb1+ 37 Kh2 Qg1+ 0-1

And seeing that mate is unavoidable, White threw in the towel.

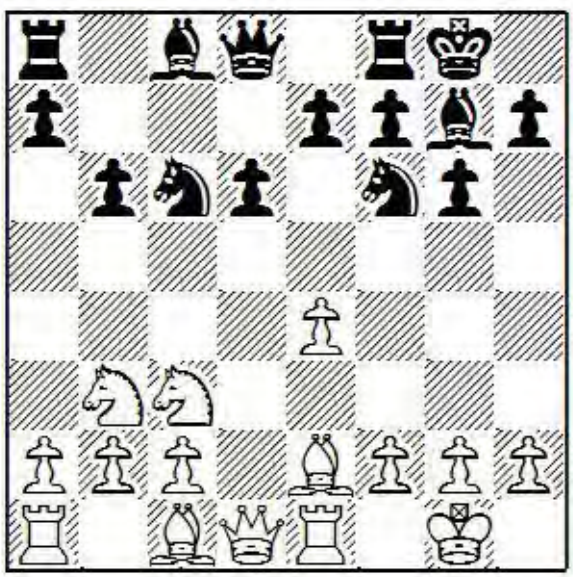
Game 10
I.Nepomniachtchi-H.Nakamura
Moscow 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Re1 Nc6 9 Nb3 Be6

Another frequently seen move is 9 ... a5 and after 10 a4 Be6 11 Bf1, we will transpose to lines covered below. Some other options:

a) The normal move 9 ... a6 is also completely possible, for example after 10 Bf1 (or 10 a4 Be6 11 Bf1 d5 12 Nc5 Bg4 13 Be2 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 d4 15 Nb1 Nd7 16 Nd3 Rc8 and Black has already taken over the initiative, N.Kabanov-Ki.Georgiev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013) 10 ... Bg4 11 f3 Be6 12 Bg5 d5 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 c3 Qd6 16 Be3 Rad8, chances are about even, G.Kamsky-B.Jobava, Brasov 2011.

b) My favourite alternative is 9 ... b6 which is flexible and solid at the same time.



Black simply completes minor piece development and aims to dislodge the future Nd5 after sufficient preparation without weakening his own queenside. We will see similar ideas in several other lines in the Classical Dragon, so the ideas are worth making note of:

b1) After 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bh4:

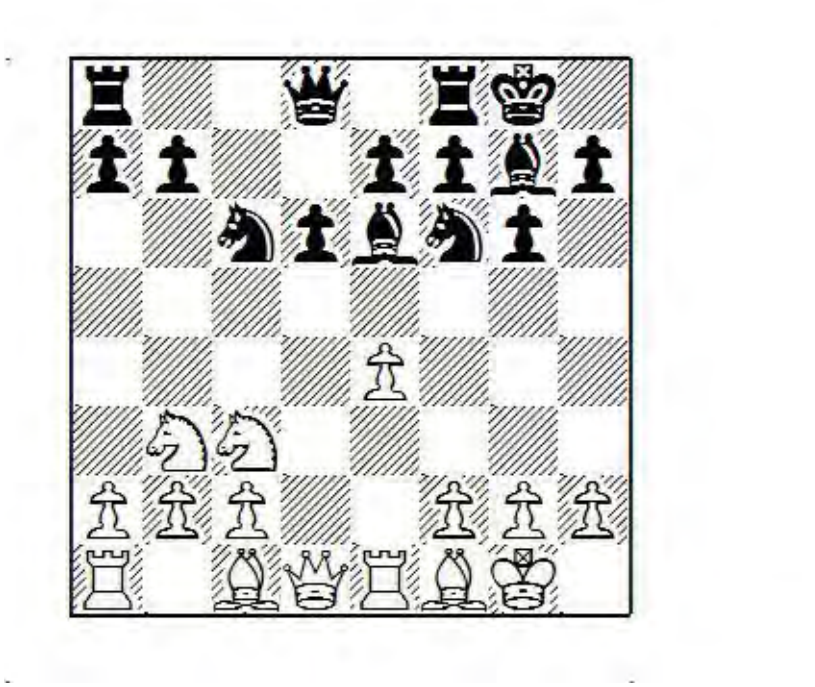
b11) 11 ... Bb7 12 Bf1 (or 12 f4 e5 13 fxe5 Nxe5 14 Bf1 a6 15 Qd2 b5 16 Rad1 Nc4 17 Bxc4 bxc4 18

e5 dxe5 19 Qxd8 Raxd8 20 Rxd8 Rxd8 21 Na5 Ba8 22 Nxc4 Rd4 and Black has taken the initiative, N.Kosintseva-Hou Yifan, Mardin 2011) 12 ... Rc8 13 Nd5 e6 14 Nxf6+ Bxf6 15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 c3 Rfd8 17 Qd2 Kg7 18 Qe3 Ne5 19 Rad1 Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 e5 dxe5 22 Rxd8 Qxd8 23 Qxe5+ Qf6, and Black has a comfortable position, Hou Yifan-V.Cmilyte, Beijing 2013.

b12) 11 ... g5!? 12 Bg3 Bb7 13 Qd2 (13 h3 might be an improvement) 13 ... Ne5 14 Qe3 Nfg4 15 Bxg4 Nxg4 16 Qe2 Ne5 17 Rad1 as played in S.Rublevsky-V.Gashimov, Poikovsky 2008, and now 17 ... Rc8 18 Nd5 e6 19 Ne3 Qe7 would have led to a pleasant game for Black.

b2) Also, 10 Bf1 Bb7 11 Bg5 Nd7 12 Rb1 was agreed drawn in Y.Zinchenko-A.Mirzoev, Rethymno 2014, but Black is fine and can even consider the radical 12 ... Bxc3!? 13 bxc3 Rc8.

10 Bf1



Question: Is there any significant difference between playing this system with 6 Bc4 or the text's 6 Be2, if White intends to retreat the bishop to the f1-square anyway?

Answer: 6 Bc4 (and later Bf1) psychologically 'dissuades' Black from playing ... Be6 and encourages Black to go for the ... a6 lines (to boot the bishop from the c4-square). However, Black really has no problems after daring a light-squared bishop trade after 6 Bc4, for example 6 ... Bg7 7 O-O O-O 8 Re1 Nc6 9 Nb3 Be6 10 Nd5 (after 10 Bxe6 fxe6, White can't really exploit the doubled-e pawns) 10 ... Rc8 11 c3 Bxd5 12 Bxd5 Nxd5 13 Qxd5 e6 14 Qb5 Qc7 15 Be3 a6 and Black has easy equality in D.Kaiumov-S.Tiviakov, Dhaka 1997.

Even if 10 Bg5 seeks to dissuade the ... d6-d5 break, it is still tactically justified to do so as after 10 ... d5 (also playable is 10 ... a5 11 a4 h6 12 Be3 d5 13 exd5, V.Kramnik-D.Navara, Prague 2008, and now 13 ... Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 gives fairly even chances), Black has no issues after:

a) 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 exd5 (or 12 Nxd5 Bxb2 13 Rb1 Bg7 14 Nc5 b6 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 Ne3 Qc7 17 Bc4 Kh8 and with his dominance over the dark squares, Black is comfortably better, P.Chomet-H.Hamdouchi, Saint Affrique 2007) 12 ... Bxc3 13 bxc3 (13 dxe6 appears to make excellent sense, giving White good compensation for the exchange but after 13 ... Bxe1 14 exf7+ Rxf7 15 Qxe1 Rf6 16 Kh1 Qb6 17 f3 Rd8 18 Bd3 a5 19 Qe4 Qb4, the compensation is fading and Black is taking over control of the game, K.Tarlev-Y.Yakovich, Moscow 2007) 13 ... Bxd5 14 c4 Be4 15 Qc1 Qd6 16 Bg4 f5 17 Be2 Nd4 and Black cannot be worse, Ye Jiangchuan-Qin Kanying, Beijing 1997.

b) 11 exd5 Nxd5 12 Nxd5 Qxd5 (or 12 ... Bxd5!? 13 c3 Qd6 14 Bf3 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Rad8 and although this is likely equal, I would rather play Black, but that is entirely a matter of taste) 13 Qxd5 Bxd5 14 c3 h6 15 Be3 Rfd8 (Black can also try controlling the c5-square with 15 ... b6 and after 16 Rad1 Rad8 17 Bb5 (with the threat of Rxd5), White has the slightly better game, thanks to his queenside pawn majority and structural advantage, V.Kramnik-L.Aronian, Moscow 2011) 16 Red1 Ne5 17 Rd2 Bc4 18 Bd4 Bxe2 19 Rxe2 Nc6 20 Bxg7 and in this equal position, a draw was agreed, J.Wegerle-R.Odendahl, Solingen

2005.

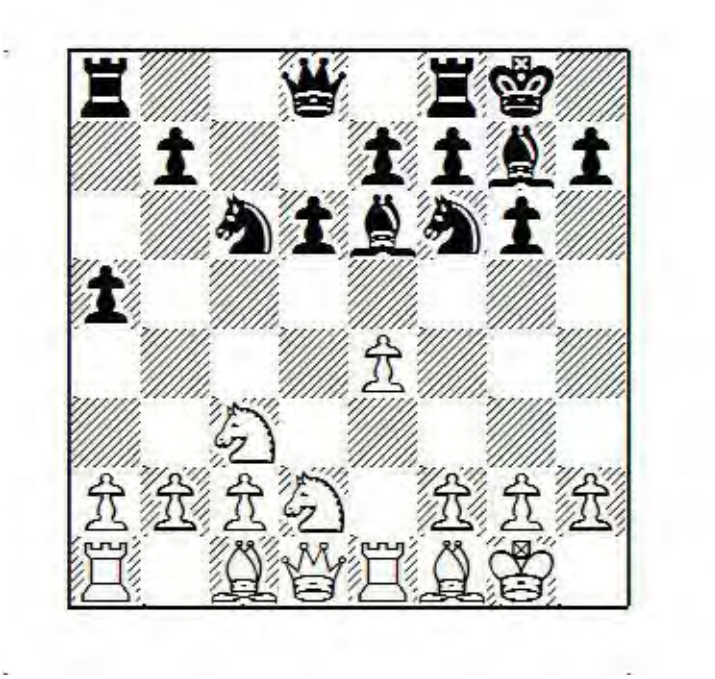
10 ... a5

If this line is supposed to be anything for White, then 10 ... d5 should not be a decent alternative for Black. However, once again, it does seem that Black can play it without any serious consequences:

a) 11 exd5 Nxd5 12 Nxd5 Bxd5 13 c3 Qd6 14 Qg4 Rad8 15 Qh4 Bf6 16 Bg5 Bxg5 17 Qxg5 e5 and chances are about equal, A.Grischuk-V.Gashimov, Moscow (blitz) 2009.

b) 11 Nc5!? dxe4 12 Qxd8 (12 Nxe6 fxe6 13 Bc4 Qb6!? gives Black adequate activity to compensate for the rotten pawns, J.Fernandez Garcia-I.Teran Alvarez, Dos Hermanas 2003) 12 ... Raxd8 13 Nxe6 fxe6 14 Bg5 (or 14 Nxe4 Nxe4 15 Rxe4 Rd1 and White will have a major headache trying to get his back rank pieces into the game) 14 ... Nd4 15 Rac1 Rc8 (15 ... h6 16 Bxf6 exf6 17 Nxe4 f5 18 Nc5 b6 was about equal in C.Bauer-H.Hamdouchi, Belfort 2002) 16 Red1 Nf5 17 h3 a6 18 a4 e3!? 19 Bxe3 Nxe3 20 fxe3 Rc7 21 Rb1 Ne8 22 Ne4 Bh6 23 Re1 Rxc2 24 Bd3 Rc8 and while Black's pawn advantage is only a doubled pawn, the structural deficiencies in White's position adds to his worries, V.Onischuk-A.Khalifman, St Petersburg 2011.

11 Nd2?!



This strange-looking move was a novelty at the time of the game, and I seriously doubt that we will see many other games with this move.

The idea is noble enough; White wants to play Nd2-c4-e3-d5, attempting to put a positional clamp on Black. The downside, however, is that it is incredibly slow and the plan will not come anywhere close to fruition.

The normal move is 11 a4 to stop the a-pawn from advancing further and lay claim to the weak b5-square. Black is doing fine in this line too. For instance:

a) 11 ... d5 is once again possible and after 12 Nc5 dxe4 13 Nxe6 fxe6 (13 ... Qxd1 14 Rxd1 fxe6 15 Bc4 Kf7 is solid and fully playable) 14 Bc4 Qb6:

a1) Despite 15 Bxe6+?! being a capture with check, it actually loses a tempo after 15 ... Kh8 16 Bb3 Ng4 17 Be3 Nxe3 18 fxe3 Bxc3 19 bxc3, R.Khusnutdinov-V.Zvjaginsev, St Petersburg 2010, and now 19 ... Rad8 20 Qg4 Rd2 21 Qxe4 Rff2 (Jones) is very uncomfortable for White.

a2) Instead 15 Rb1 is better after 15 ... Nb4 (15 ... Ng4 is not possible because of 16 Bxe6)16 Qe2 Nbd5 17 Bg5 with a complex game.

b) Or 11 ... Bxb3 12 cxb3 e6!? (or 12 ... Nb4 13 Bg5 h6 14 Be3 Rc8 15 Rc1 Kh7 16 Qe2 Nd7 17 Qd2 as played in A.Kovalev-M.Jirovsky, Czech Republic 2006, and now 17 ... Nc5 18 Bc4 Nc6 leaves Black with a comfortable game and about equal chances) 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bh4 Qb6 15 Nb5 Rad8 16 Qf3 Ne5 17

Qe3 Qxe3 18 Rxe3 g5 19 Bg3 Nh5 20 Bxe5 Bxe5 21 Rd1 Nf6, and only Black can be better, L.Lenic-M.Pavlovic, Ljubljana 2003.

Question: Why do strong players intentionally play moves that they know are possibly not the best?

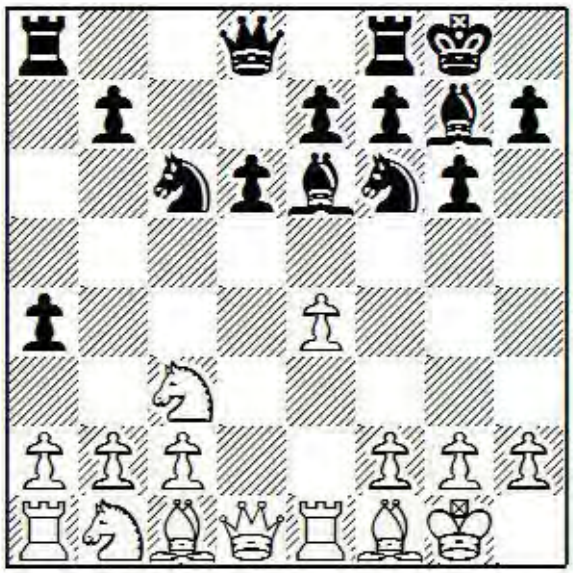
Answer: Good question! In this case, it is possibly because prior to this game, Nakamura had not played many games in the Dragon as Black, and therefore the Russian grandmaster might have wanted to shake him up a bit by taking him out of theory and home preparation. This of course is no reason to play sub-optimal moves, but Nepomniachtchi possibly did not realise how inferior his move turned out to be.

11 ... a4

Laying claim to more queenside space and already now the threat of ... a4-a3 is looming on the horizon, softening the a1-h8 diagonal.

The text move is far more ambitious than the standard equaliser 11 ... d5 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Bxd5 and Black has a rather comfortable game already. The fact that Black can play both ... a5-a4 and ... d6-d5 indicates why White should not play 11 Nd2.

12 Ndb1?!



Trying to dissuade Black from advancing ... a4-a3 and attempting to block the advance with Na3. Instead 12 Nc4 would have made more sense of his previous move although it wouldn't be enough to equalise after 12 ... d5 (12 ... a3!? 13 Nxa3 would transpose to 12 ... a3 as in the following note) 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 and I prefer Black though White is still in the game.

12 ... Ra5!?

Preparing ... d6-d5 with maximum force. There were other good alternatives too:

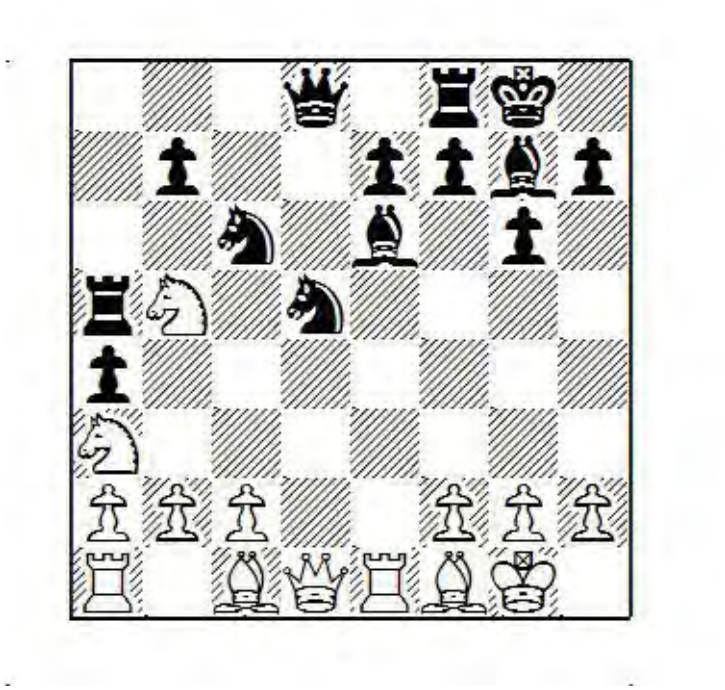
a) 12 ... a3 anyway was apparently suggested by Nepomniachtchi after the game and it is indeed a good idea, for instance 13 Nxa3 Rxa3 14 bxa3 Ng4 15 Bd2 Bd4 16 Re2 Bc4 (Jones), and Black regains the exchange with a very pleasant position.

b) Gawain Jones also analyses 12 ... Qb6!?, developing the queen yet helping to tie down White further and making room for ... Rfd8 to prepare the ... d6-d5 break. After 13 h3 Rfd8, White's position look overwhelmingly underdeveloped, while all of Black's pieces are on their ideal squares. This can only spell trouble for White. Following 14 Nd5 Nxd5! 15 exd5 Bxb2 16 Bxb2 Qxb2 17 Nc3 Qxc3 18 dxe6 f5 19 Rb1 Nb4 (Jones), the position looks sad for White.

c) Black has one more option, one which may in fact be Black's best, but as a suggestion by my silicon friend, it bears evidence of being produced by a deep-calculating monster: 12 ... Ng4! 13 h3 Nxf2!! 14 Qf3 (or 14 Kxf2 Qb6+ 15 Re3 f5, and White will probably not survive) 14 ... Bd4 15 Be3 Nxe4 16 Qxe4

(after 16 Bxd4 Nxd4 17 Qxe4 Qb6 18 Kh1 Qxb2 19 Qxd4 Qxa1, Black is obviously better) 16 ... d5 17 Qf3 (17 Qxd4 Nxd4 18 Bxd4 Re8 is clearly better for Black) 17 ... Bxe3+ 18 Qxe3 d4 19 Qf2 dxc3 20 Nxc3 a3 21 b3 Qd4 with a solid advantage for Black in the middlegame.

13 Na3 d5 14 exd5 Nxd5 15 Ncb5!?



Question: What is the purpose behind this move?

Answer: With this move, White makes the claim that Black's rook on a5 is misplaced. In my opinion, however, it is rather artificial because using two somewhat misplaced knights to prove a rook's folly is not quite an appropriate use of material. Of course that may not mean that it is not the best option.

Instead, Gawain Jones suggested 15 Ne4!? Qc8 16 Nc4 Ra7 17 Ng5 a3 18 Nxe6 fxe6 19 Rb1 when things are at least a bit messy. But analysing things a bit further, Black has 19 ... b5! 20 Nxa3 Rxa3 21 c4 bxc4 22 bxa3 Nc3 23 Qc2 Nd4 24 Qb2 Qc5 25 Be3 Nxb1 26 Rxb1 c3 and he is at least comfortably better.

15 ... Qc8 16 c3

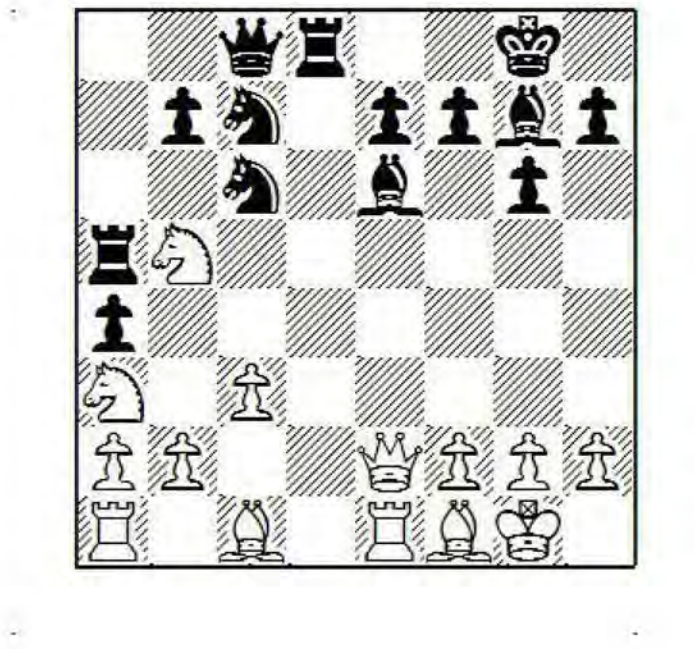
As indicated by Jones, the better move for White is probably 16 Bd2!? Ra8 (16 ... Bxb2!? 17 c4 Nf6 18 Rb1 is incredibly complicated but can be considered and after 18 ... Bg4 19 Be2 Bxa3 20 Bxa5 Bf5 21 Nxa3 Bxb1 22 Nxb1 Nxa5 23 Qxa4 Nc6, with the dust settled, Black is a tad better), and only then 17 c3, leaves the game more of less equal following 17 ... Rd8 18 Qe2.

16 ... Rd8 17 Qe2?!

The more active 17 Qf3 Bg4 18 Qg3 Bf5 19 Bg5 looks perfectly playable.

17 ... Nc7

The Russian chess trainer *par excellence* Mark Dvoretsky has put some emphasis into a theory about superfluous pieces. As mentioned above, White is using two knights to block on the b5-square, which means that only one of them is truly well-placed. By that rationale, Black's latest move helps White because in essence, he is inviting an exchange of the poorly-placed a3-knight for a well-placed d5-one.



Question: That sounds complicated, should I feel stupid if that makes no sense to me?

Answer: Absolutely not! It is a complicated theory that can help players guide them to make better choices in certain types of positions. In this case, Nakamura, who is decidedly a very strong grandmaster, chose to ignore the theory (if he considered it at all). That hopefully tells you the lofty level of this concept. However, all this being said, I do think that Nakamura's move was not the best.

For instance 17 ... Bg4 should be considered, though after 18 f3 Bf5 19 Qf2 e5 20 Bg5 f6 21 Bd2 Bf8 as indicated by Jones, Black's space advantage and generally more active pieces should promise him the better chances.

18 Rd1?!

It seems White can do better:

a) With the newly available squares after the knight retreat, it would make sense to get the bishop in play, say after 18 Bf4 Nxb5 19 Nxb5 and here the computer likes 19 ... a3!? 20 Nxa3 Rxa3 21 bxa3 Bxc3 22 Rac1 Bxe1 23 Rxe1 Qd7, which it claims to be a little better for Black. This may be true but the pair of bishops and the weak dark squares around Black's king do not make this an open and shut case for a Black advantage.

b) Alternatively, the computer also likes 18 Nxc7 Qxc7 19 f4!?, deeming the position equal by producing a line that leads to a repetition of moves. However, it does look a bit artificial, and Black should optically better though certainly, it is not by much.

18 ... Nxb5 19 Nxb5 Ne5

The threat of ... Bc4 forces White to make a retreat he would rather not want to.

20 Na3

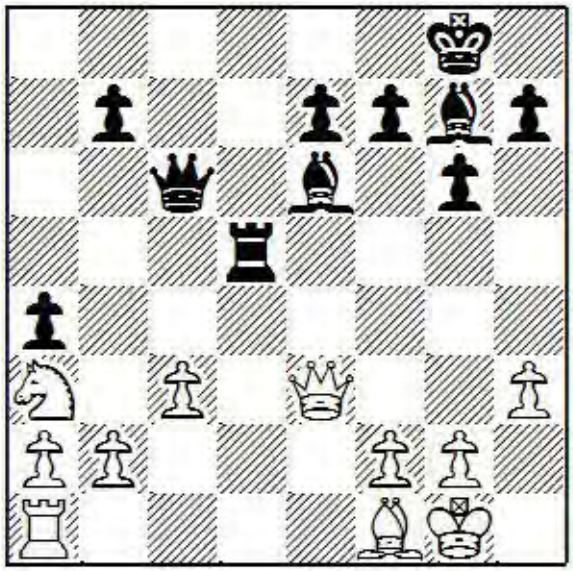
Exchanging on d8 leads to play similar to that in the game after 20 Rxd8+ Qxd8 21 Na3 (21 Bf4? does not do White any favours either after 21 ... Bc4 22 Qd1 Qxd1 23 Rxd1 Bxf1 24 Rd8+ Bf8 25 Bh6 Nd7 and Black is much better) 21 ... Rd5 22 Bf4 Nd3 and Black is in control of the game.

20 ... Rad5 21 Rxd5 Rxd5 22 Be3?!

White is naturally eager to get his Bc1 and Ra1 developed, but as my mother has always reminded me, if you rush, you often make poor choices. This is certainly one such case. By allowing Black to gain the bishop pair, Black's advantage really begins to take shape.

The more careful 22 h3, preventing ... Ng4 and followed by Be3 makes a lot of sense.

22 ... Ng4 23 h3 Nxe3 24 Qxe3 Qc6



Black has secured a very nice advantage with control of the centre, the open d-file, the bishop pair, active play and overall, better-coordinated pieces. However, winning a position such as this against a hard-fighting strong player such as 'Nepo' is not exactly an easy task.

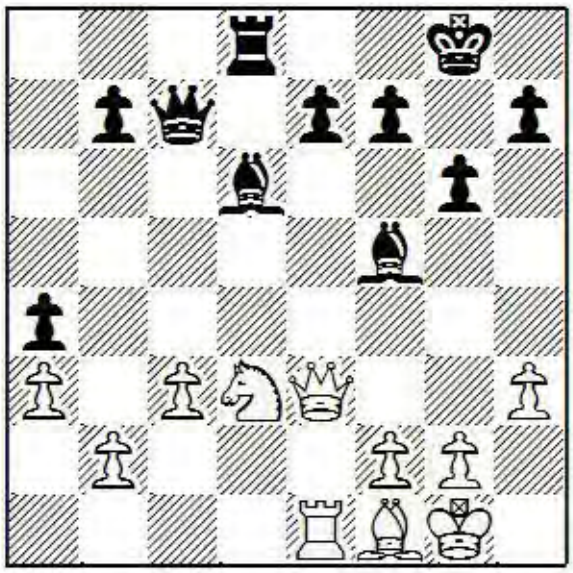
25 Nc2

Aside from threatening the obvious ... Nb4 fork, this move finally gets the knight back into play.

25 ... Qc7 26 a3

Another solid move that permanently stops potential black tricks involving ... a4-a3. This of course also means that White has a rather immobile pawn majority on the queenside.

26 ... Be5 27 Nb4 Rd8 28 Nd3 Bd6 29 Re1 Bf5!?



Question: Stop, stop, stop! Why does Black have any interest in possibly exchanging his bishop against the knight? The bishop pair is an asset that Black should hang on to, right?

Answer: You are absolutely right, the bishop pair is an asset that should not be given up lightly, and I can assure you that even if Nakamura does play unconventional ideas from time to time, he does not throw away an obvious advantage without having considered it carefully first. In this case, he makes a tough judgement call. In his estimation, the bishop pair can achieve less of an advantage than the imbalance he can create by having opposite-coloured bishops.

Question: But surely having opposite-coloured bishops is a drawing factor, right?

Answer: Yes, it can be, but with other pieces on the board, it is a different situation. Opposite-coloured bishops favour the player with the initiative, in this case, Black. This is because White cannot defend well on the dark squares as his bishop only plays on the light squares.

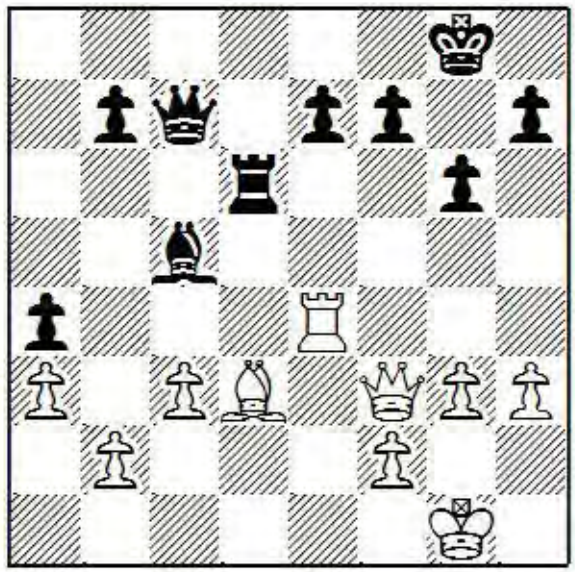
Question: So essentially, Black has an extra piece on the dark squares?

Answer: Correcto mundo! That is the claim that Nakamura is willing to put a significant stake in.

30 g3 Bxd3!?

Black follows through on the idea behind the previous move. However, he could also consider keeping the bishop with 30 ... Kg7 followed by ... f7-f6 and ... e7-e5 with a space advantage along with the bishop pair.

31 Bxd3 Bc5 32 Qf3 Rd6 33 Re4



White tries to play actively to counter-balance Black's initiative and the issues related to the opposite-coloured bishops we discussed earlier. The more passive 33 Re2 Rf6 34 Qg2 Qd6 would leave White with a dreary defensive task ahead, even if Black does not have anything decisive for some time to come. Nevertheless, this would have been White's best option.

33 ... Rb6 34 Bc4?!

Instead, 34 Re2 Rf6 transposes to the 33 Re2 variation seen above and that would have been White's best option. However, White has committed himself to playing actively.

34 ... e6!

This should be the end of White's counterplay.

35 Re2

Not 35 Qe2? which runs into the nasty 35 ... Qxg3+.

35 ... Bxa3!

Winning a pawn.

36 Bxe6 Bxb2

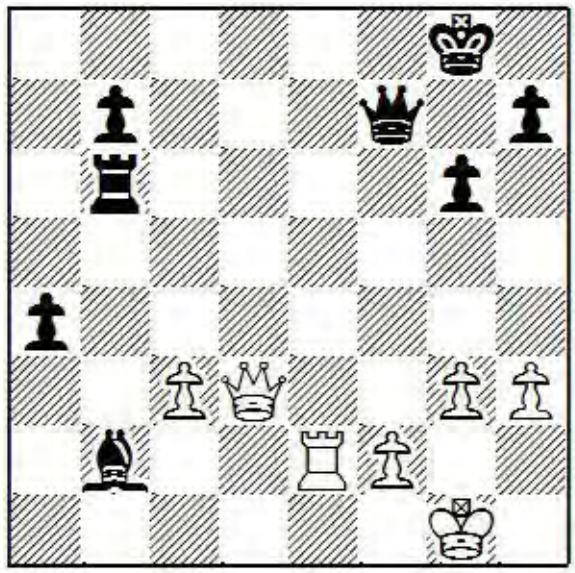
As Jones pointed out, Black can also play 36 ... Rxb2 37 Ba2 Rxe2 38 Qxe2 Bc5 but the exchange of the rooks removes a key element in Black's initiative and brings White closer towards positions where the opposite-coloured bishops are a real drawing factor.

37 Bxf7+?

Objectively speaking, this is a poor move. 37 Ba2 is the correct defensive move, leaving Black better, but not yet winning and having to avoid tricks like 37 ... Bxc3?! 38 Bxf7+ which brings White back into the game.

However, with the time control approaching, White makes a practical decision hoping that the ensuing complications will bring some opportunities for Black to go wrong.

37 ... Qxf7 38 Qd3



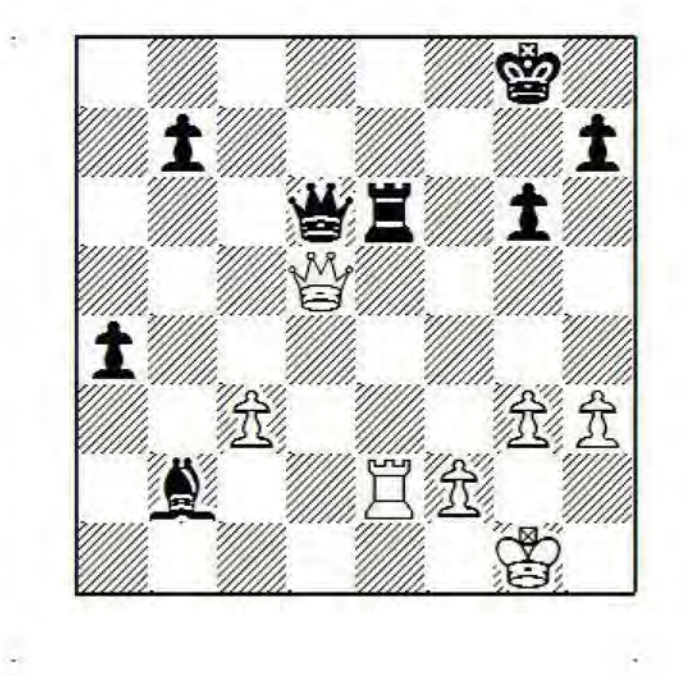
38 ... Re6??

With only three moves left to reach the time control, Black blunders and rewards White for his gamble on move 37.That said, the best continuation is far from simple to calculate with little time on the clock. Black could have played 38 ... Qc7! 39 Re8+ (39 Qd5+ Kf8 40 Qe4 Ba3 41 Qe8+ Kg7 42 Qxa4 Bc5 also allows Black to consolidate) 39 ... Kg7 40 Qd4+ (or 40 Rd8 Qxc3 41 Qd7+ Kh6 42 Qxa4 Qe1+ 43 Kg2 Rb4! and the Black king is safe) 40 ... Rf6 41 Rd8 Qxc3 42 Rd7+ Kg8 43 Rd8+ Rf8 and White will soon run out of checks.

39 Qd8+ Kg7 40 Qd4+ Kg8 41 Qd8+ Qf8!

Sacrificing the rook is the only practical chance to in the game.

42 Qd5 Qd6



Exercise: What is White's best move?

43 Qxd6?!

Answer: 43 Qxe6+! looks hazardous in view of Black's dangerous a-pawn, but it appears that it just about holds up after 43 ... Qxe6 44 Rxe6 Kf8 45 Re4 b5 46 c4 (this was evaluated as a draw by Nakamura during the post mortem) 46 ... b4 47 c5 a3 48 Rxb4 a2 49 Ra4 a1Q+ and although this was given as winning for Black in *TWIC*, Jones correctly evaluates this as a draw. The black bishop is of the wrong colour to make the h-pawn count and therefore, White's defensive task is rather easy. After the text move, White enters a very difficult rook ending which should win for Black.

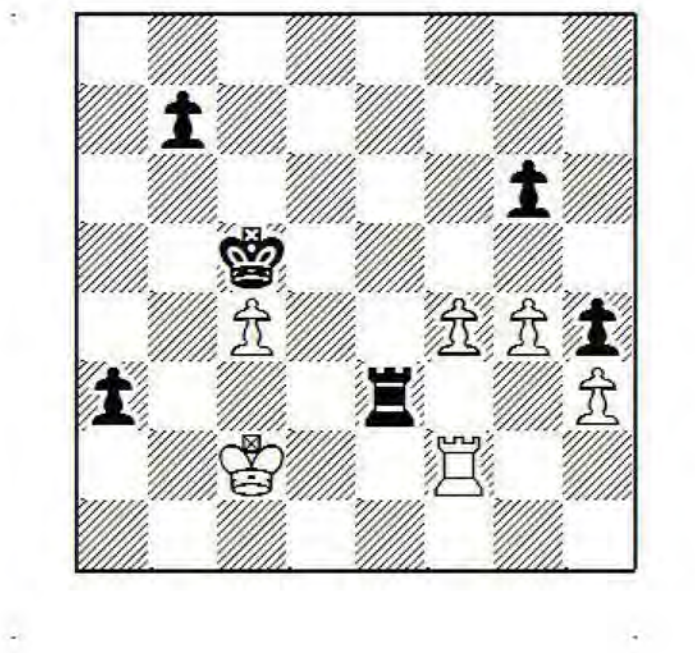
43 ... Rxd6 44 Rxb2 a3 45 Ra2 Ra6

The material is equal, but the position is not. White's passive, defensive rook along with Black's far advanced passed pawn leaves Black with all the chances. However, rook endings are notoriously difficult to play precisely.

46 Kf1!

This is only way to stay in the game. The passive a2-rook on needs to be activated. Playing the king more actively with 46 Kg2 fails for the same reason following 46 ... Kf7 47 Kf3 Ke6 48 Ke4 Ra4+! 49 Kd3 Kd5 50 c4+ Kc5 51 Kc3 Ra6! 52 f4 Re6 which wins for Black (*TWIC*).

46 ... Kf7 47 Ke2 Ke6 48 Kd3 Kd5 49 f4 h5 50 g4 h4 51 c4+ Kc5 52 Kc3 Re6 53 Rf2 Re3+ 54 Kc2



Exercise: Black has maximised his piece activity. What is his best move here?

54 ... Kxc4?

Answer: Black's best move is 54 ... Kc6! which should win for Black. The point is that the king goes back to f8 to block the advancing f-pawn. One line runs 55 f5 gxf5 56 gxf5 Kd7 57 f6 Ke8 58 f7+ Kf8 and either the h- or f-pawn will fall. After the obvious-looking text move, Black will be forced to passively block White's passed pawn with the rook, making the win a lot more complicated.

55 f5 g5!?

Pawn exchanges make White's defence easier and therefore this is the way to go for Black.

56 f6 Re8

A more active approach is 56 ... Rb3 but I suspect that it is not sufficient to win. The idea is obviously ... Rb2+, followed by the capture of the white rook:

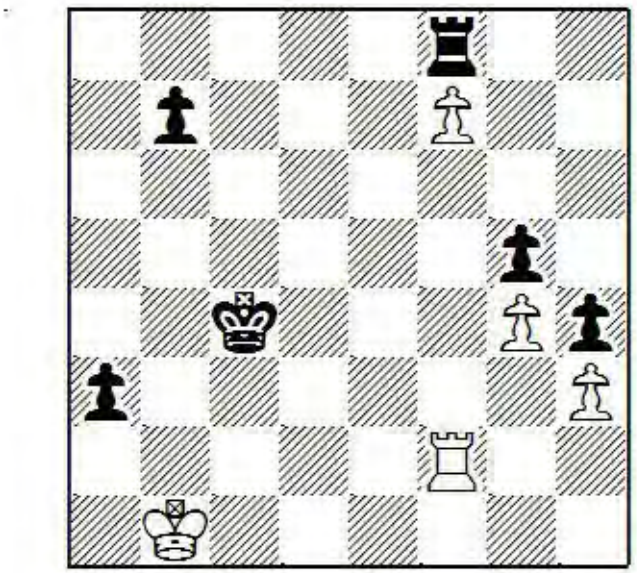
a) 57 Rf4+? is a cute idea which allows White to queen first, but unfortunately it fails to 57 ... gxf4 58 f7 Rc3+ 59 Kb1 Kb3 60 f8Q a2+ 61 Ka1 Rc1 mate!

b) Also 57 Rf5 is inadequate, because it loses a vital tempo after 57 ... Rb2+ 58 Kc1 Rb6 59 Rf2 a2 60 Rxa2 Rxf6 and Black should win with his extra pawn and superior pieces.

c) This forces 57 Kc1! and 57 ... a2 58 Rxa2 Rf3 is mentioned by Jones, but I have been unable to find a win after 59 Ra4+ Kc5 60 Ra7 Kc6 (60 ... Rxf6 61 Rxb7 Rf3 62 Rg7 and it's a draw) 61 Ra5 Rxf6 62 Rxg5 Rf3 63 Rh5 Rxh3 64 g5 and barring a blunder from White, I don't think Black can win.

57 f7 Rf8 58 Kb1

Instead, 58 Rf5 b5 59 Kb1 is similar to what is discussed in the note after Black's 58th move.

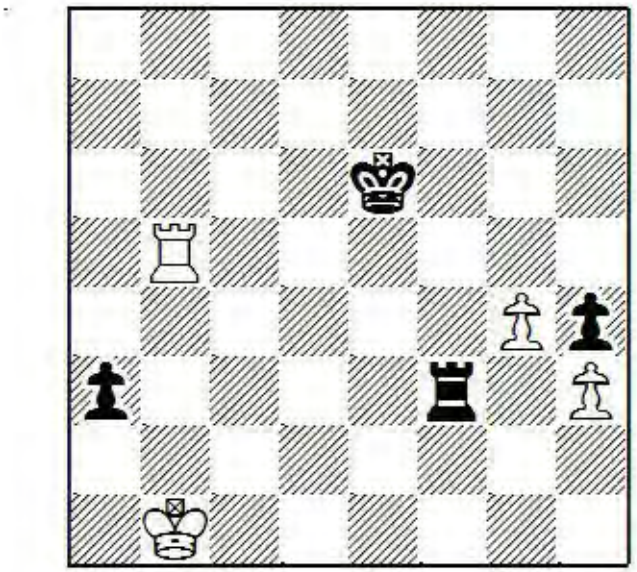


58 ... Kd5

Question: Should Black try to keep the a- and b-pawns together as connected passed pawns? It looks like a certain win.

Answer: Good logic, but in rook endings, good logic does not always work. Nakamura had undoubtedly established that he could not win because after 58 ... b5 59 Ka2 b4 60 Rf5 Kc3!? (intending ... b4-b3) 61 Rf3+ Kd4 62 Rf5, he can neither advance the queenside pawns nor approach White's kingside pawns. Also, it is not possible to release the rook from its passive position on f8. However, Black may be able to play on with 62 ... Kc4 63 Rf6 Kd5 64 Kb3 Ke5 65 Rf3 Ke6 66 Kxb4 Rxf7 67 Rxa3 Ke5 68 Kc4 Ke4 and Black should have excellent winning chances. The bottom line: 58 ... b5 was likely a much better attempt at winning.

59 Rf5+ Ke6 60 Rxg5 Rxf7 61 Rh5 b5 62 Rxb5 Rf3



It could be an easy mistake to make to assume that Black is better or even winning in this position. That is, however, far from the case. It is in fact a relatively easy draw.

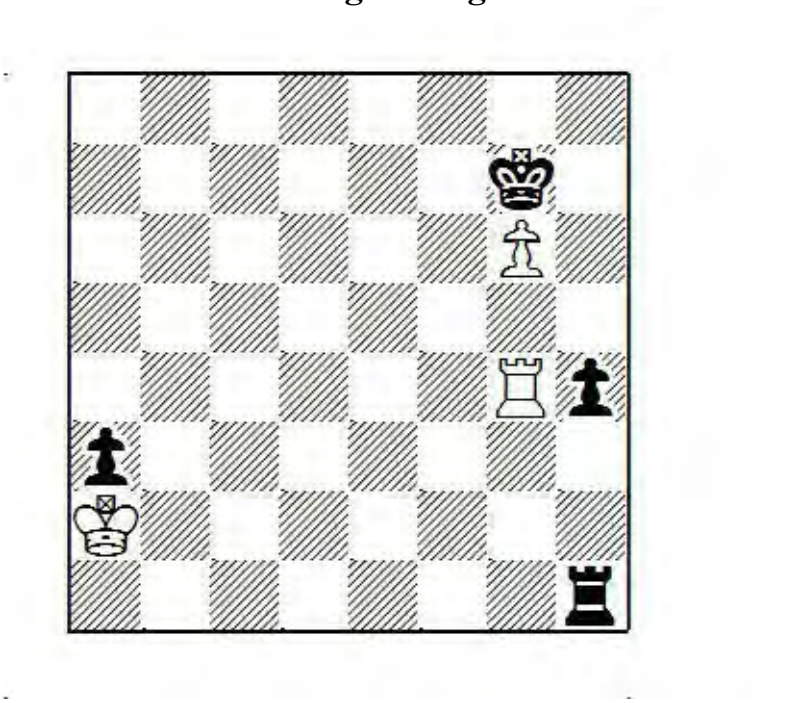
63 Rb6+ Ke5 64 Rb5+ Ke6 65 Rb6+ Kd5 66 g5

Strictly speaking White could have continued the checks, but perhaps being tired after a long game, he preferred playing something that he knew to be a draw by heart. After 66 Rb5+ Ke4 (or 66 ... Kc4 67 Rb8 Rxh3 68 g5 Rg3 69 Rh8 Kb3 70 Rb8+ Kc3 71 Rh8) 67 g5 Rxh3 68 g6 Rg3 69 Rb4+ Kf5 70 Rxh4, White will win the a-pawn as well.

66 ... Rxh3 67 Rb4 Ke5 68 g6 Kf6 69 Rg4 Kg7

Also, 69 ... Rh1+ 70 Ka2 Kg7 71 Kxa3 h3 72 Kb2 h2 73 Rh4 Kxg6 74 Rh8 is a simple draw.

70 Ka2 Kh8 71 Rf4 Kg7 72 Rg4 Rh1



73 Rb4

Question: Why does White not just take the a3-pawn?

Answer: Taking the pawn allows Black the required time to release the h1-rook from its passive position: after 73 Kxa3?? h3 74 Rh4 Kxg6 75 Kb2 Kg5 76 Rh7 Kg4, and the Black king will reach h2, securing the win for Black.

After the text move, White will end up two pawns down in the rooks ending, but unfortunately it is a draw anyway.

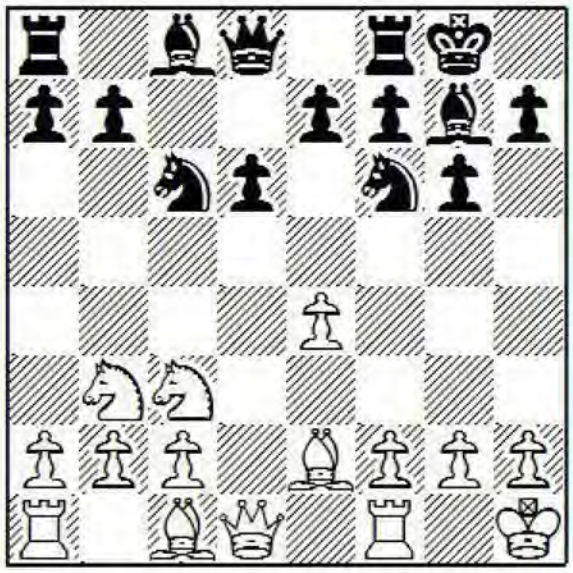
73 ... h3 74 Rb3 Kxg6

My computer claims that Black is winning with 74 ... h2 75 Rh3 Kxg6 but this is in fact a well-known drawn position. The white rook keeps attacking the Black h-pawn from behind and gives the appropriate checks if the king gets close to being able to relieve the h1-rook of its guarding duties.

75 Rg3+ Kf5 76 Rc3 Ke5 77 Rxa3 Rh2+ 78 Ka1 Kf4 79 Rb3 Rh1+ 80 Ka2 Rh2+ 81 Ka1 Rh1+ 82 Ka2 Kg4 83 Rb4+ Kg3 84 Rb3+ Kg4 85 Rb4+ Kg3 ½-½

Game 11
L.Nisipeanu-M.Carlsen
Foros 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nb3 0-0 9 Kh1



9 ... a6

Black has a couple of alternatives to our main game move, but they are riddled with possible transpositions, so I have chosen a couple that stay clear of those:

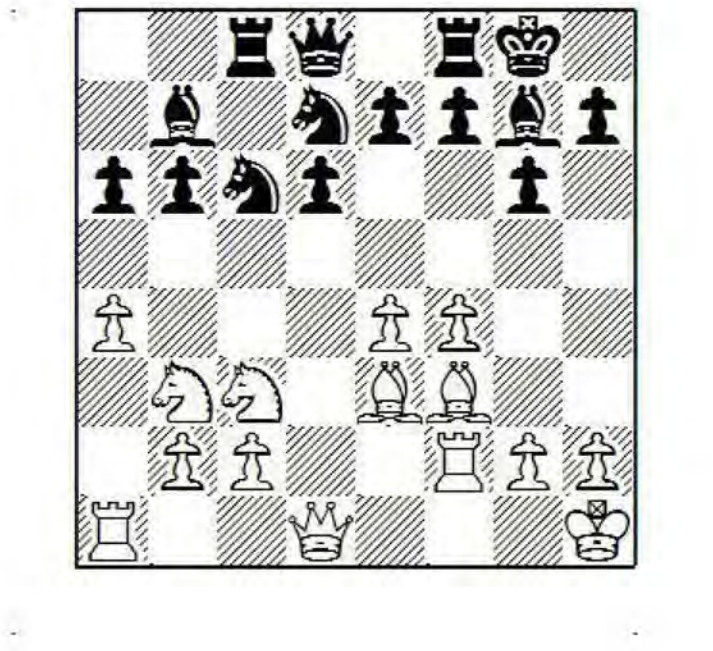
a) 9 ... a5 10 a4 Be6 (10 ... Nb4 is in line with 9 ... a5 and is also playable – Black wants to play ... d6-d5 at some point) 11 f4 (11 Bg5 transposes to the Karpov Variation that we covered earlier in this chapter) 11 ... Qc8 12 Be3 Nb4 (12 ... Bg4!? also makes good sense) 13 Nd4 Bc4 14 f5 Ra6 15 Bg5 Re8 16 Rc1 Nd7 17 Qd2 Bxe2 18 Ncxe2 Nc6 19 Bh6 Bf6 20 b3 Nxd4 21 Nxd4 Qc5 and chances are more or less even, P.Thipsay-U.Adianto, Kolkata 1998.

b) I suppose the 'normal' move is 9 ... Be6, and after 10 f4, Black's best is probably 10 ... Rc8 (10 ... Na5 is naturally also playable with 11 f5 Bc4 12 Bd3 Rc8 13 Qe2 a6 14 Bg5 Bxd3 15 Qxd3 Nc4 16 Rab1 Ne5 17 Qe2 b5 reaching a normal Classical Dragon position where chances are approximately equal, R.Lau-P.Leko, Nettetal 1994) 11 f5 (11 Be3 transposes to 9.Be3 Be6 10.f4 Rc8 11.Kh1, which we cover in the last game of this chapter) 11 ... Bd7 12 Bg5 Ne5 13 fxg6 hxg6 14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 exd5, J.Sorensen-W.Watson, Herning 1991. Now Black just seems to be better after 15 ... Nc4 (15 ... b5!? also looks good) 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 Qe2 Qc8 18 c3 Be5 and Black has the bishop pair and better coordination.

10 f4

Restraining Black with 10 a4 looks sensible, but it has the distinctive downside of weakening the b4-square. Here Black has a couple of alternatives to choose between:

a) I have a particular fondness for the quirky 10 ... b6!? which is quirky though it also resembles a line for the Accelerated Dragon that I have played with Black several times. After 11 f4 (11 Be3 Bb7 12 f3 Rc8 is a more solid alternative from both sides with even chances) 11 ... Bb7 12 Bf3 Nd7 13 Be3 Rc8 14 Rf2:



Exercise: Time to think outside the box. What are Black's two best moves in this position?

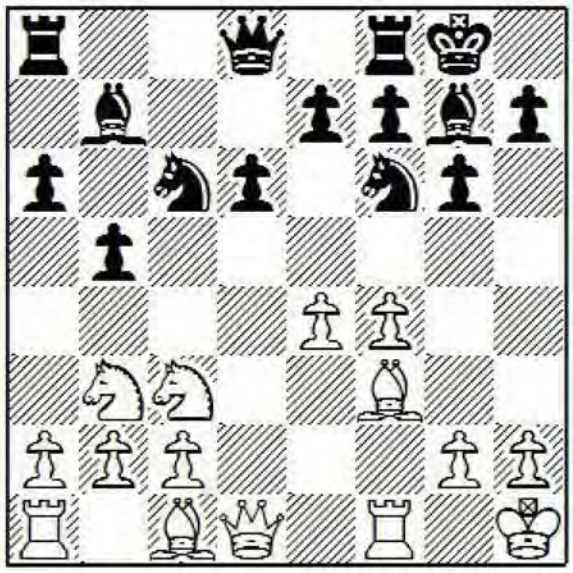
Answer:

a1) Black has the counter-intuitive 14 ... Na5! and as the spaceman in the *Lego Movie* said ... "Whaaat?" Why is Black voluntarily taking on a doubled pawn and on the a-file of all places? For starters, it opens up the b-file which only Black can take advantage of. Furthermore, White has almost no active play, whereas Black can just pile up on the c-file, apply pressure against White's centre and along the g7-b2 diagonal. An overall win-win-win situation for Black. After 15 Nxa5 bxa5 16 Ra3 Rc4 (16 ... Bxc3!? 17 bxc3 Nc5 also looks enticing) 17 Rb3 Qc8 18 Qd3 Rb4 19 Rf1 Nc5 20 Bxc5 Qxc5 21 Nd1 Rc8 22 Rxb4 axb4, Black's doubled pawns have straightened out and now he wins a pawn as well. Needless to say, White is going down! Following 23 Qd2 Qxc2 24 Qxb4 Qc4 25 Qxc4 Rxc4 26 b3 Rb4 27 e5 dxe5 28 fxe5 Rxb3 29 e6 fxe6 30 Bxb7 Rxb7, being two pawns down against Kramnik, White decided he had enough and gave up, I.Smirin-V.Kramnik, Bugojno 1999.

a2) The other move to consider is to give up the Dragon bishop (!) with 14 ... Bxc3!? 15 bxc3 Qc7, intending ... Nc6-d8-e6 with excellent play for Black, albeit this looks more artificial than Kramnik's move. Hence, it is vital to not exclude moves based on one's prejudice about structure or piece preference.

b) 10 ... Be6 11 f4 Bxb3!? 12 cxb3 e6 13 Bf3 (13 f5!? seems anti-positional but is worthy of consideration and after 13 ... Qe7 14 fxg6 fxg6 15 Bg5 h6 16 Bh4 Rad8 17 Qd3, chances are about even) 13 ... Qe7 14 Re1 Nd7 15 Be3 Rfd8 16 Re2 Rac8 17 Rd2 Nc5 and I prefer Black, A.Kovalev-V.Georgiev, Batumi 1999.

10 ... b5 11 Bf3 Bb7



This kind of set-up is almost the ideal of what Black should strive for against the Classical Dragon. It is far from always achievable though. Let's face it, White moves every other time and will put his mind towards some objectives of his own.

12 a4

White challenges Black on the queenside. A number of other moves have been tried at this point as well:

a) 12 e5 looks attractive, but Black easily wards off White's initiative with 12 ... dxe5 13 Nc5 (13 fxe5 Nd7 14 e6 fxe6 15 Bg4 looks problematic, but Black takes over the initiative with 15 ... Qc7! 16 Bxe6+ Kh8 17 Bxd7 Qxd7 with a lead in development and overall, the more active pieces) 13 ... Qb6 14 Nxb7 Qxb7 15 fxe5 (the pin on the c6-knight looks annoying, but that too is without real repercussions) 15 ... Nd7 16 e6 fxe6 17 Ne4?! (17 Be3 Nde5 naturally is also better for Black) 17 ... Rad8 18 Qe1 Nde5 19 Ng5 Qc8 20 Qh4 h6 21 Ne4 Nd4 and Black has close to a winning advantage, A.Cherniaev-G.Serper, St Petersburg 1994. White has been moving his pieces about without accomplishing anything, whereas all of Black's pieces are ideally placed,

b) 12 Be3 Nd7! 13 Nd4 Na5 14 b3 Rc8 15 Qd2 Nc6 16 Nce2 Qc7 17 Rac1 Nxd4 18 Bxd4 e5 19 Ba1 Nc5 gives Black an obviously pleasant position, A.Sznapik-G.Sax, Baile Herculane 1982.

c) 12 Nd5!? e6 (12 ... Nd7!? is a reasonable alternative) 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6 14 c3 Qc7 15 Be3 Rad8 16 Qe2 Nb8 17 Qf2 (17 Rfd1 Nd7 18 a4 is probably better) 17 ... Nd7 18 Rfd1 Be7 19 Bd4 e5 20 Be3 exf4 21 Bxf4 Ne5 with a comfortable position for Black, D.Barua-T.Bakre, Calicut 2003. The e7-bishop looks a little odd instead of being in the g7-fianchetto hole but this factor is really inconsequential.

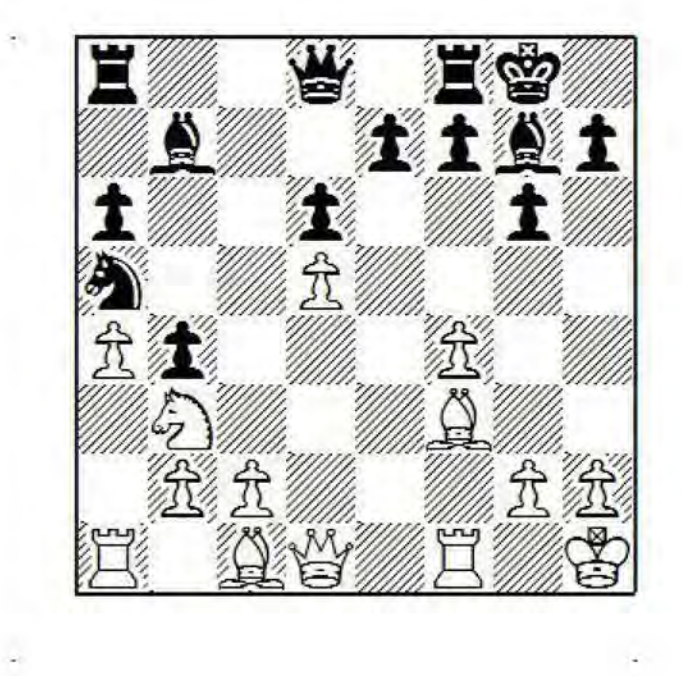
12 ... b4 13 Nd5 Nxd5

The most aggressive choice. The fact that Black is doing well at this point is well-illustrated by the fact that he has no less than two perfectly good alternatives available:

a) 13 ... e6!? 14 Nxf6+ (14 Ne3 Qc7 15 Bd2 a5 looks pleasant for Black and it is hard to tell how White can try to find play) 14 ... Bxf6 15 Qd3 Rc8 16 Rb1 Qc7 with a comfortable position for Black, although strictly speaking, chances are about level.

b) 13 ... Nd7!? 14 a5 (14 f5 e6 15 Nf4 Qe7 is good for Black, according to Ftacnik) 14 ... e6!? 15 Ne3 Qc7 16 Nc4 Nd4! 17 Nb6 Nxf3 18 Nxa8 Bxa8 19 gxf3 f5 looks attractive for Black. The exchange is well compensated for in form of active pieces, the bishop pair, a lead in development and as for White, he has a weakened pawn structure and a somewhat vulnerable king.

14 exd5 Na5



Exercise: This is a good point to take stock of the situation. Please quantify the positional factors and assess the situation.

Answer:

a) Each side has a semi-open file to play on.

b) Black has a bad b7-bishop but White is likely forced to keep his on f3 to protect the d5-pawn, which also makes it less than productive.

c) The black g7-bishop is much stronger its c1-counterpart and unless the knights get exchanged off, Black's a5-knight is stronger than White's one on b3.

Overall, this calls for Black's position to be at least slightly better.

15 c3

This knee-jerk reaction, a pawn sacrifice, seems like an overreaction to the issues we discussed on the previous moves. But rather than staying passive and trying to wiggle out of Black's slight pressure, White prefers active play.

Other options:

a) In another game, White tried 15 Qd3 Rc8 16 Nd4 Qb6 17 Rd1 Qc5 and it is obvious that Black is in control, D.Boulay-P.Charbonneau, Montreal 1997.

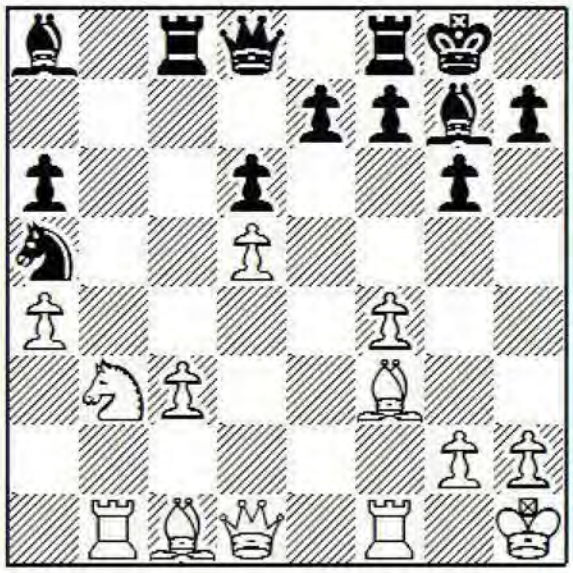
b) Alternatively, 15 Nxa5 Qxa5 16 Re1 Bf6 17 Qd3 Rfc8 (Ftacnik) is better for Black as well.

15 ... bxc3 16 bxc3 Rc8!

Black prefers to keep the initiative, intending to cash in his chips later on. Accepting the pawn sacrifice with 16 ... Bxc3 offers White some counterplay in form of activity and play against the less than ideally placed b7-bishop after 17 Rb1 Rb8 18 Be3 Bc8 19 Qd3 Bg7 20 Nd4 Rxb1 21 Qxb1 and White definitely got his worth for the sacrificed pawn.

17 Rb1 Ba8

Tugging the bishop safely in the corner. The depth of White's problems is easy to spot: the c-pawn is terminally weak and the c4-square looks appetising for the knight.



18 Nd2?!

Suggesting some kind of improvement for White isn't easy because his position is fundamentally bad. Nevertheless, 18 f5!? has been recommended by Ftacnik:

a) Ftacnik mentions the strange 18 ... gxf5 19 Nd4 Qd7 20 Qd3 e6 21 Qxa6 and White is better.

b) Also, Ftacnik analysed 18 ... Bxc3 19 Bh6 Bg7 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Qd4+ Kg8 22 fxg6 hxg6 23 Nd2 with adequate compensation for the pawn.

c) The simple 18 ... Nc4!? 19 Bg5 Bxc3 20 Rc1 Bf6! has White's initiative running out of steam.

d) Black can also consider 18 ... Nxb3 19 Rxb3 Qa5 which just looks better for Black.

18 ... Nc4!?

Now Black can take the c3-pawn with impunity, Ftacnik gives 18 ... Bxc3 19 Qe2 Qd7 20 Qxa6 Qxa4 21 Ne4 Qc2, and White is struggling to stay afloat.

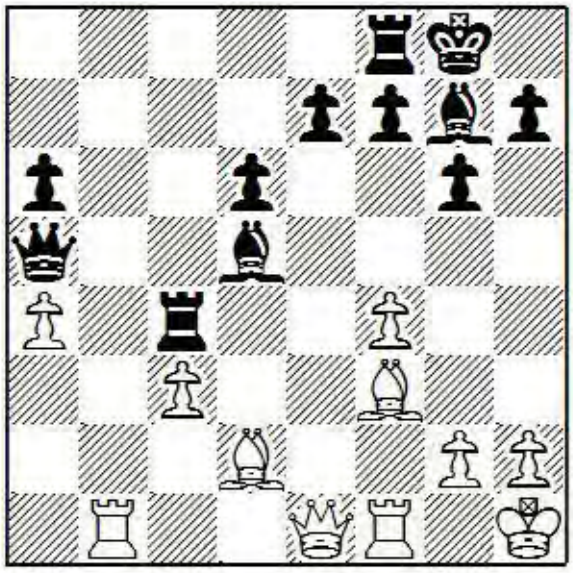
19 Nxc4 Rxc4 20 Bd2 Qa5

It is safe to say that the opening has been a complete failure for White who is left with passive pieces and small handful of weak pawns that Black can collect at will.

21 Qe1

21 Be2 intending to play c3-c4 runs into 21 ... Qxd5, threatening mate on g2. Also, 21 Qe2 does not offer White any relief as after 21 ... Bxd5 22 Qxe7 Bxf3 23 Rxf3 Qd5, the a-pawn is next to fall.

21 ... Bxd5!?



A boisterous decision. The simple 21 ... Bf6 was both solid and good as Black picks up the a4-pawn and can then start working on the c3-pawn. However, Carlsen clearly couldn't wait to bring the 'dead' a8-bishop back to life, even if it meant an exchange sacrifice.

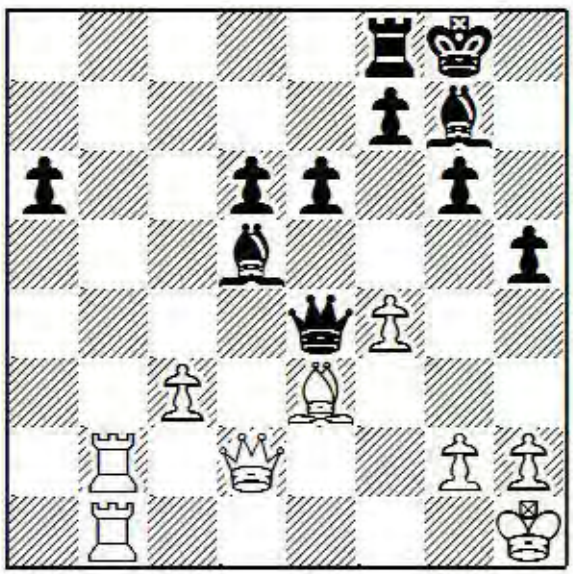
22 Be2 Qxa4

The idea behind the previous move: White wins the exchange, but the black bishops are murderously strong.

23 Bxc4 Bxc4 24 Rf2 e6

Black is completely dominating the game, White has no counterplay and can basically just wait for Black to put his pieces in place and put him out of his misery.

25 Be3 Bd5 26 Rfb2 Qe4 27 Qd2 h5!



Aside from the c-pawn being weak, the g2-pawn is also soft, and the way for Black to build onto the already established pressure is to send the h-pawn towards h3. Naturally, 27 ... a5 is a good alternative.

28 Bd4

Not 28 Rb8? Which is instantly punished with 28 ... Bxc3!.

28 ... Bh6

There is no need to exchange pieces which would eliminate the bishop pair and lighten the pressure on

White's position.

29 Be3

Once again, White cannot afford to play 29 Rb8 due to 29 ... Bxf4.

29 ... a5 30 Rb8?

In time trouble, White tries to exchange a rook to lighten the pressure a little. Relatively better but hardly promising is 30 Ra1 Ra8 31 Kg1 e5 and Black wins another pawn.

30 ... Kh7!?

Magnus decides to toy a little with his opponent who was in severe time trouble. The alternative 30 ... Rxb8 31 Rxb8+ Kh7 is of course plenty good. In fact, it is possibly slightly better than the text move because the b8-rook has nowhere to go.

31 h3?!

In bad positions, there are no good moves. Naturally, 31 Rxf8? loses instantly to 31 ... Qxb1+; whereas 31 R8b2 Rc8 looks pretty hopeless as well.

31 ... Rxb8 32 Rxb8 Bg7

Simply threatening to take on c3.

33 Bd4 Bxd4 34 cxd4 a4

And just as it seemed that it could not get any worse, the a-pawn is set in motion.

35 Kh2 a3 36 Rb4 a2

Hello!

37 Ra4 Qb1 0-1

White decided he had enough. After 37 ... Qb1 38 Qc3 Qf1 39 Qb2 Qxf4+ 40 Kh1 Qf1+ 41 Kh2 Bxg2 42 Qxg2 a1Q, there is not much joy left for White.

Game 12
P.Svidler-M.Carlsen
Nice (blindfold) 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Be3 Nc6 9 Nb3 a6

This is the primary of several minor alternatives to the main line move 9 ... Be6, which we will cover in the next few games. The other alternatives are:

a) 9 ... b6 is solid, but not particularly ambitious. Black puts a bishop on b7 to press the e4-pawn, making sure that White doesn't get too ambitious. In J.Radulski-N.Ninov, Bankia 2011, chances were about even after 10 Qd2 Bb7 11 Rad1 Ne5 12 f3 Rc8 13 Bh6 Qc7 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Qe3 Rfd8 16 Nb5 Qb8 17 N5d4 d5.

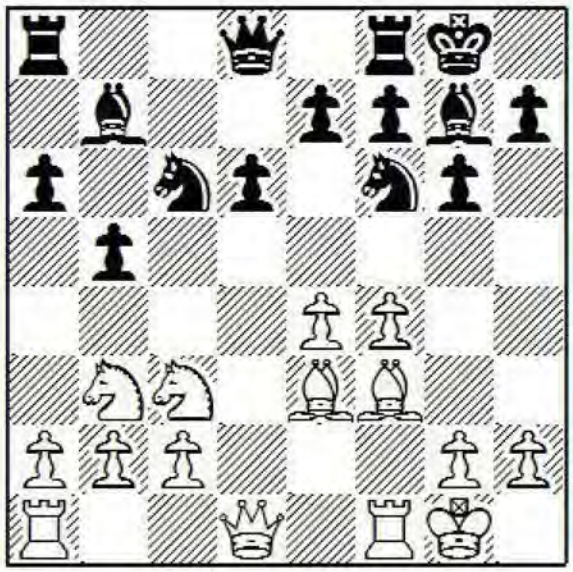
b) 9 ... a5 is an old-fashioned way of playing which still sees action from time to time. The idea is to force White to play a2-a4, allowing Black access to the b4-square. White in return gets the b5-square and additionally, might be able to exploit the soft b6-square. After 10 a4 Be6 11 f4 Nd7 12 Kh1 Nb6 13 Nd4 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Bxd4 15 Qxd4 Rc8 16 f5 Bc4 17 Bd3, White has the more comfortable position with a kingside attack in the works, P.Thipsay-P.Kotsur, Jodhpur 2003.

c) 9 ... Bd7 looks passive, but it is perfectly fine and after 10 f4 Rc8 11 Qe1 a6 12 Kh1 b5 13 Rd1:

c1) 13 ... Nb4!? (Black initiates an interesting little sequence that may not make sense to everybody) 14 Rd2 Nxc2!? (the point of the previous move) 15 Rxc2 b4 (regaining the piece) 16 Bxa6 Ra8 17 Bd3 bxc3 18 bxc3 was N.Short-I.Nepomniachtchi, Havana 2010. Now, 18 ... Bc6 19 Bg1 Nd7 would have left Black with perfectly acceptable compensation for the pawn as all of Black's pieces are on good squares and he can build up considerable pressure against White's weak a- and c-pawns.

c2) Also, 13 ... b4 14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 exd5 Na5 16 Qxb4 Nxb3 17 cxb3 Bxb2 18 Bc4 (18 Bxa6 Bc3 19 Qb7 Rb8 leads to a draw) 18 ... a5 19 Qd2 Bf6 is less risky and roughly equal.

10 f4 b5 11 Bf3 Bb7



This is the most principled choice, countering the white bishop on the long diagonal, but it plunges the game into instant complications. Let's have a look at the other options:

a) A far more radical, knee-jerk reaction is 11 ... e5 and after 12 f5 Rb8 (as Ward points out, 12 ... gxf5 13 exf5 Bb7 is not that appealing for Black after, for instance, 14 Bg5) 13 g4 b4 14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 exd5 Ne7 16 Be4 f6 17 Qd3 Kh8 18 Nd2, G.Cabrilo-B.Larsen, New York 1988, now 18 ... Qc7 would have been best, though White is definitely more comfortable. Nevertheless, Larsen nevertheless pulled a win out of the hat in the end.

b) Far more solid is 11 ... Bd7 12 Qd2 (12 e5?! looks attractive but is in fact not very good and after 12 ... dxe5 13 fxe5 Nxe5 14 Bxa8 Qxa8 15 Bd4 Bg4 16 Qe1 Nc6, White is up an exchange for a pawn but Black's active pieces spelt trouble. Hence, White decided to pull the emergency brake with 17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 Rxf6 exf6 19 Qh4, S.Conquest-D.Gurevich, Graz 1995 and now Black gained the advantage with 19 ... Ne5 20 Qxf6 Re8) 12 ... Rb8 13 Nd5 b4 14 Rfe1 Nxd5 15 exd5 Na5 16 Bd4 Nc4 17 Qf2 Bxd4 18 Qxd4 Rc8 19 Rad1 Bf5 20 Re2 a5 and chances are about even but White has to be careful dealing with Black's queenside initiative, I.Glek-D.Gurevich, Geneve 1994.

c) Finally, another possibility is 11 ... Qc7 12 Qd2 b4 (less forcing is 12 ... Bg4 13 Nd5 Nxd5 14 exd5 Bxf3 15 Rxf3 Nb8 though White has the more comfortable position after 16 Bd4 due to the backward e-pawn) 13 Nd5 Nxd5 14 exd5 Na5 15 Qxb4 Nxb3 16 cxb3 Bxb2 17 Rab1 a5 18 Qc4 Qxc4 19 bxc4, L.Martinez Duany-Y.Gonzalez Vidal, Las Tunas 2009, and now 19 ... Bf6 is about level.

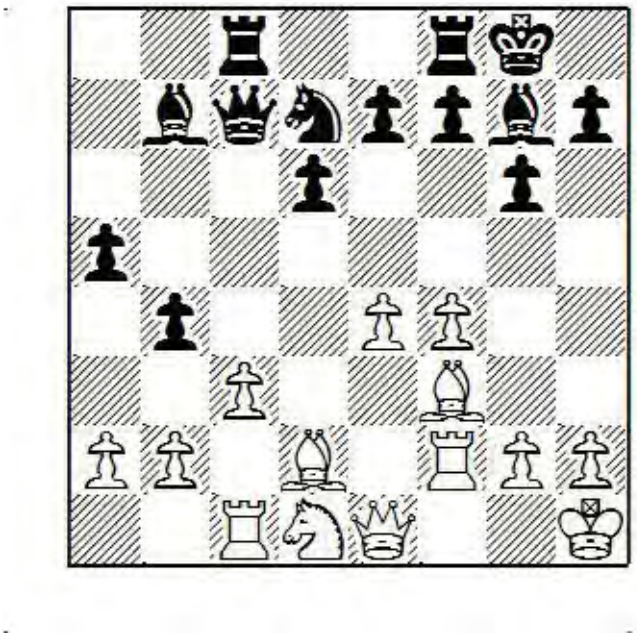
12 e5

White responds in kind with the most direct move:

a) The more vanilla move, 12 Qd2 is of little consequence to Black, and after 12 ... Nd7!? 13 Qf2 Na5 14 Bb6?! (14 Nxa5 Qxa5 15 Bd4 Bxd4 16 Qxd4 Rac8 17 a3 is definitely better than the game continuation, but is nevertheless quite comfortable for Black) 14 ... Qxb6 15 Qxb6 Nxb6 16 Nxa5 Bd4+ 17 Kh1 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Rab8, White's pawn structure is a mess and he is clearly going to suffer in the endgame, J.Armas-C.Sena, Villagarcia de Arosa 1995.

b) White played into Black's hands in a pedestrian manner after 12 Kh1 Nd7 13 Qe1 Rc8 14 Rf2 Na5 15 Nxa5 Qxa5 16 Bd2 Qc7 17 Rc1 b4 18 Nd1 a5 and in attempting to fight on the queenside against Black's minority attack, decided to counter with 19 c3.

Question: How does Black meet this attempt to play with a queenside majority?

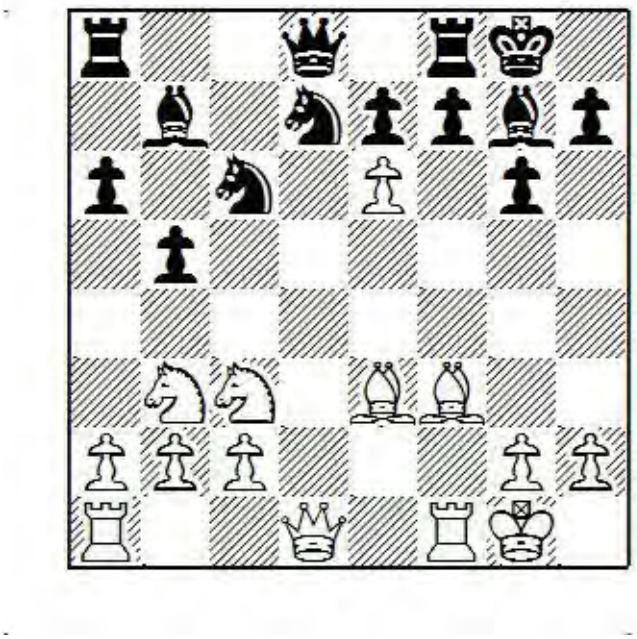


Answer: With so much space ceded to Black, it is not surprising that Black can counter this threat tactically by exploiting the weakness of the light squares. Black temporarily sacrificed the b-pawn with 20 ... b3! 20 c4 (instead, 20 axb3 is met by 20 ... Nc5! and there is no good answer to the threat of ... Nd3 or ... Nxb3) 20 ... bxa2 21 Bxa5 Qb8 22 Nc3 Nc5 23 Qd1 Bxc3 (even stronger is 23 ... Qa7!) 24 Bxc3 Bxe4 with a large advantage for Black, A.Timofeev-Wang Hao, Ningbo 2010.

12 ... dxe5 13 fxe5!?

Rather remarkably up to this point, the game followed R.Spielmann-O.Bernstein, St Petersburg 1909, where White instead tried the tempting 13 Nc5 but it turns out that this is clearly better for Black after 13 ... exf4 14 Nxb7 Qc7 15 Bxf4 Qxb7. While White's bishops certainly look nice, they do not compensate adequately for the sacrificed pawn, say after 16 Qe2 Rae8 17 a4 b4 18 Nd5 Nd4! and Black is edging closer to a winning position.

13 ... Nd7 14 e6!?



Question: This move seems very double-edged. Is it necessary?

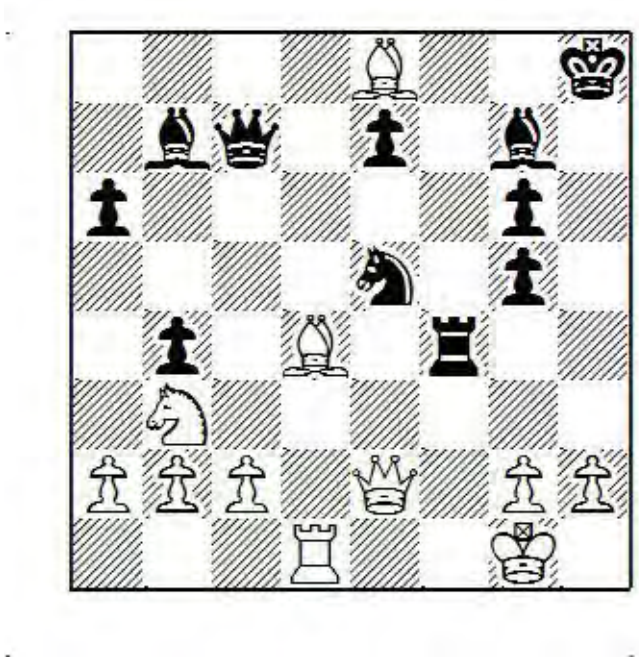
Answer: Actually, this is the logical move in the position, messing up Black's pawn structure since the e-pawn is hanging anyway. At the same time, Black's pieces become very lively and the f-file has opened up for him so White has to defend accurately.

14 ... fxe6 15 Bg4 Rxf1+ 16 Qxf1 Nce5!?

My computer prefers the more passive 16 ... Nf8 17 Nc5 Qc7, but I'm quite certain that Carlsen had analysed this quite carefully and found the game continuation stronger or at least more difficult for White to counter.

17 Bxe6+ Kh8 18 Rd1 Qc7 19 Qf4

Rather amazingly, the future world champion had already previously played everything up to this move. In a game against a fellow Norwegian grandmaster from six years earlier, White went in a slightly different direction with 19 Qe2 but after 19 ... Rf8 20 Bd4 (White could also consider 20 Nd5 Bxd5 21 Bxd5 Nb6 22 Nc5 Nxd5 23 Rxd5 Qc6 24 Rd1 Nc4 25 c3 e5 and this complex position is evaluated as about even by my computer, although I have a slight preference for White on account of his better pawn structure) 20 ... b4 21 Ne4 Rf4! (all of Black's pieces are getting in on the action) 22 Ng5? (22 Nf2 was the way to go, but White was possibly eager for active counterplay and concerned about taking protection away from g2, hence deciding to put the knight on g5 instead) 22 ... h6 23 Bxd7 hxg5 24 Be8? (this is a luxury White does not have time for and instead, 24 Be6 would have kept the game going although after 24 ... Bf3! 25 gxf3 Nxf3+ 26 Kh1 Nxd4 27 Nxd4 Bxd4 28 Qc4 Qe5, Black is in command of the game):



a) Carlsen played 24 ... Re4 25 Qf2 Rg4 26 g3? (no better is 26 Bxe5 Qxe5 and Black calls the shots) 26 ... Nf3+ 27 Kf1 Qc4+ 28 Rd3 Bxd4 29 Nxd4 Rxd4 30 b3 Rxd3 31 bxc4 Rd1+ 32 Ke2 Rd2+ 33 Ke3 Rxf2, and after a few more moves, White decided he had enough, R.Djurhuus-M.Carlsen, Molde 2004. Given the success of this game, it is hardly a surprise that Carlsen did not hesitate to repeat the opening against Svidler.

Question: Does Carlsen have a stronger alternative here instead of 24 ... Re4?

Answer: A murderous knight sacrifice rips apart White's kingside.

b) 24 ... Nf3+! 25 gxf3 Bxf3 26 Bxg7+ Kxg7 is even stronger than Carlsen's move. White will have to give up lots of wood to avoid getting mated.

19 ... Rf8

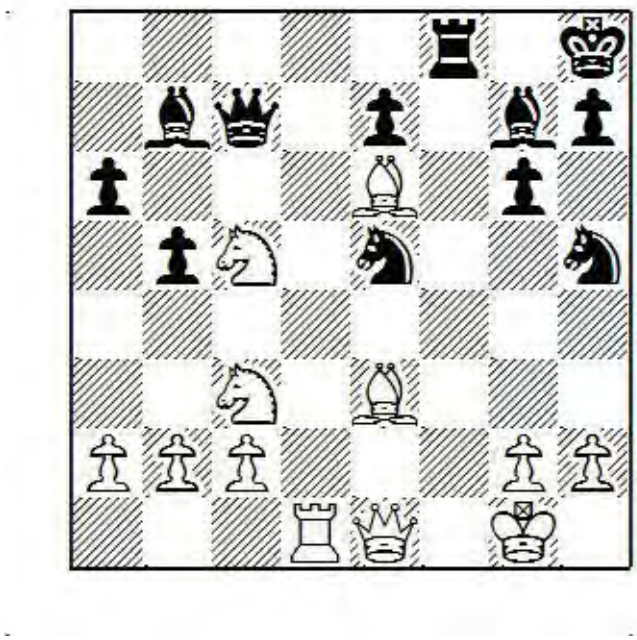
Bringing the rook in on the action.

20 Qg3

The alternative is 20 Qh4 Rf6 21 Bh3 Rd6 22 Qxe7 Rxd1+ 23 Nxd1 Qxc2, leaving Black with the initiative in the rook-less middlegame. Although White should be able to survive, it is clearly Black who is having the most fun here.

20 ... Nf6 21 Nc5 Nh5! 22 Qe1?

The lesser evil was 22 Qh3 and after 22 ... Nf4 23 Bxf4 Qxc5+ 24 Qe3 Qc6 25 Bd5 Ng4! 26 Bxc6 Nxe3 27 Bxe3 Bxc6, Black's pair of bishops should promise him the slightly better chances in the endgame. That being said White is nowhere near being lost. Not so in the game, however!



Exercise: The position seems ripe for a combination, given Black's tremendous activity. How should Black close out the game?

Answer: The key is to clear the f3-square for the knight and hence, expose the h2-pawn to attack following that.

22 ... Bxg2!

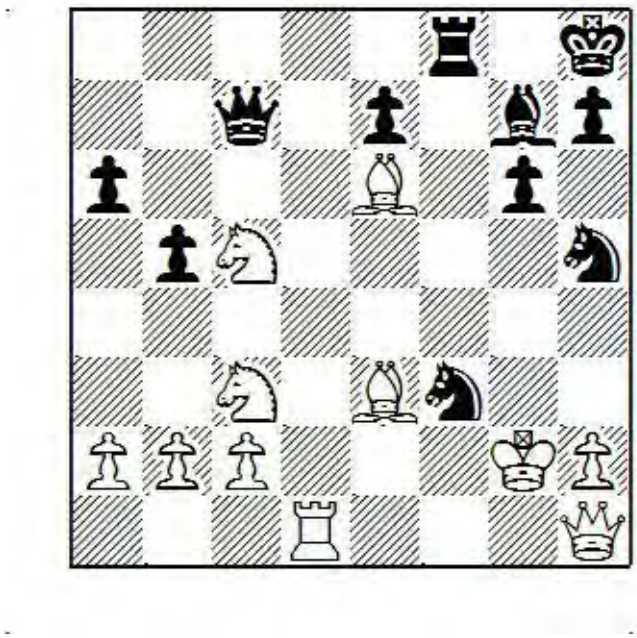
Immediately taking advantage of the lack of White kingside defenders. All of a sudden, White's king is the sole defender of a crumbling position.

23 Kxg2 Nf3

The point behind the previous move, hitting both the queen and threatening ... Qxh2+.

24 Qh1

The ugly only move.



24 ... Nf4+?

Considering that our game is a blindfold rapid game, we can forgive Carlsen for not playing the most accurate continuation which is 24 ... Nh4+! 25 Kg1 (25 Kh3 Rf3+ 26 Kxh4?! Bf6+ 27 Kg4 Rg3+ is a pretty conclusion to Black's attack) 25 ... Qe5 26 N3e4 Nf4 27 Bg4 Qh5! and it is curtains for White.

25 Kf2

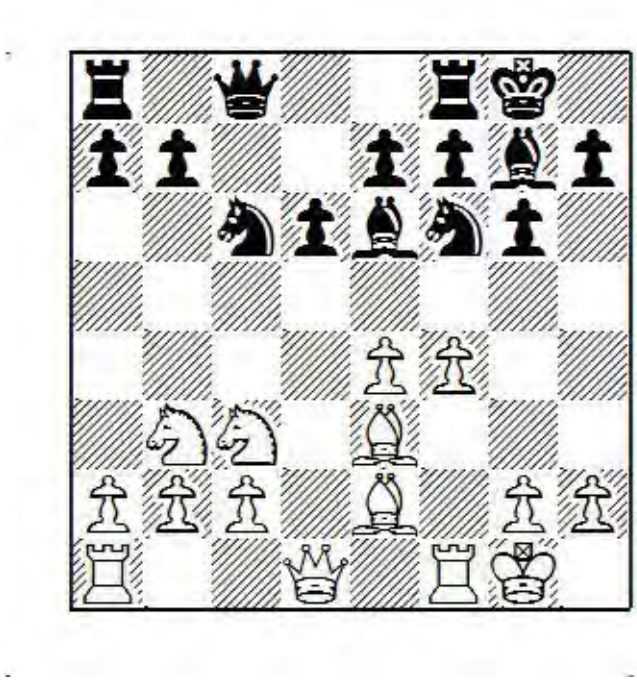
White's position collapses rather quickly after 25 Kxf3 Nxe6+.

25 ... Nd4 0-1

At this juncture, White either resigned prematurely or lost on time. After 25 ... Nd4 26 Nd7 Nh3+ 27 Ke1!? Nxc2+ 28 Kd2 Nf2 29 Kxc2 Nxh1 30 Nxf8 Bxf8 31 Kb1 (31 Rxh1?! b4! 32 Rf1 Bg7 33 Bf4 Qb6 is even worse for White) 31 ... Qxh2, while Black is definitely better, White is still playing on.

Game 13
J.Timman-S.Tiviakov
Wijk aan Zee 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Be2 0-0 8 Nb3 d6 9 0-0 Be6 10 f4 Qc8



Question: What is the purpose of this queen shift?

Answer: This is a multi-purpose move. It:

1) Deters f4-f5 (and g2-g4) by overprotecting the f5-square and the h3-c8 diagonal.

2) Prepares ... Bg4 to trade the light-squared bishops.

3) Prepares ... Rd8 with the ... d6-d5 break to follow.

4) Guards the c6-knight in the event that Black tries to play ... b5 following a White Bf3 move (intending e4-e5).

Black has a couple of rarely played, but very interesting alternatives at this juncture:

a) Now 10 ... b5!? looks really provocative.

Question: Can White swipe the b-pawn with 11 Bxb5? It looks like a freebie, doesn't it?

Answer: Well, it is possible for White to make the pawn-grab, albeit at the expense of a strong Black initiative.

a1) After 11 Bxb5, Black wheels in 11 ... Ng4 which threatens the dark-squared bishop that cannot leave the diagonal because ... Qb6+. Therefore White has to answer 12 Qe2 Nxe3 13 Qxe3, and now the other knight copies the idea with 13 ... Nb4 14 Qf2 (14 Bd3 Qb6!? 15 Qxb6 axb6 and my computer claims Black to be better, offering 16 f5 gxf5 17 exf5 Bxb3 18 axb3 Bd4+ 19 Kh1 Rxa1 20 Rxa1 Rc8 and Black

wins back the sacrificed pawn) 14 ... Rc8 (14 ... Qb6!? is again a fully viable idea) 15 f5 Bc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4, and here Black has enough play for the pawn, but certainly no more than that, D.Kononenko-A.Kislinsky, Dnipropetrovsk 2001.

a2) In view of the above line, White has tried something more solid such as 11 Bf3, guarding the pawn and threatening e4-e5:

a21) 11 ... Rc8 12 Nd5 Nd7 13 c3 a5 14 a3 a4 15 Nd4?! (15 Nd2!? Bxd5 16 exd5 Na5 should be about equal, although I would prefer to play White as Black's initiative on the queenside has been stopped and White can now apply pressure along the e-file and on the kingside) 15 ... Bxd5 16 exd5 Nxd4 17 Bxd4 Bxd4+ 18 Qxd4 Qb6 (Black exchanges down to a good knight versus a bad bishop ending) 19 Rad1 Rc4 20 Qxb6 Nxb6 21 g3 Kg7 22 Rfe1 Kf6, although several sources (and my computer) call this equal, it is clearly more fun to play Black, E.Mortensen-P.H.Nielsen, Tjele 1991.

a22) 11 ... b4 12 Nd5 Bxd5 13 exd5 Na5 was P.Wacker-I.Rausis, Bad Godesberg 2012. Now White should have played 14 Nd4 Nc4 15 Bf2 (with Nc6 to come) and White should be better.

a23) 11 ... Qd7 12 h3 Ne8 13 a3 Bc4 is an untried possibility, which is possibly playable for Black, but it does have an artificial feel to it.

Let's return to the position after 10 f4.

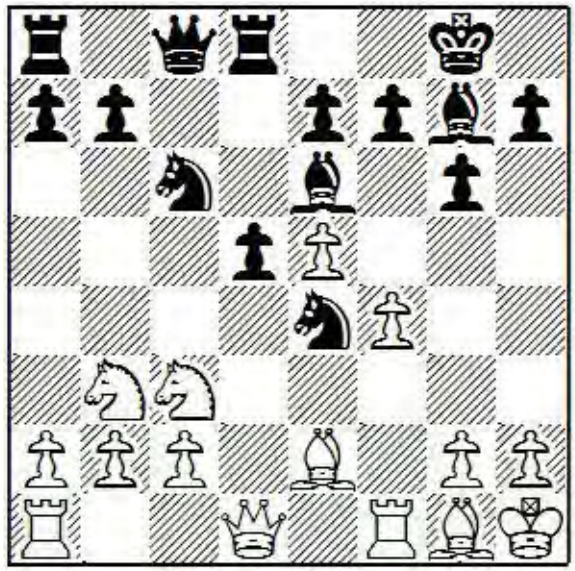
b) The rare 10 ... a5!? deserves attention as it is better being played on the 9th move (as analysed in Game 11). In fact it isn't clear why it shouldn't be satisfactory for Black:

b1) 11 a4 Bxb3 12 cxb3 e6 13 Qd2 Qe7 14 Rad1 d5 15 exd5 exd5 and Black is doing fine, A.Zozulia-A.Delchev, Lodi 2007.

b2) 11 Nd2?! d5 12 e5?! d4 13 exf6 exf6 14 Bf2 dxc3 15 bxc3 f5 and Black is already clearly better, S.Beukema-D.Reinderman, Vlissingen 2013.

11 Kh1 Bg4

Unsurprisingly Tiviakov plays what he thinks is best rather than what has been played the most. The old main move is 11 ... Rd8 12 Bg1 d5 13 e5 Ne4.



Now the key moves for White are:

a) 14 Nb5 and here we branch off again:

a1) 14 ... f6 15 exf6 exf6 16 c3 f5 17 a4 Kh8 18 a5 d4 19 N3xd4 a6 20 Na3 was P.Negi-G.Jones, Yerevan 2007 and now 20 ... Bxd4 21 cxd4 Nxa5 gives Black the better chances.

a2) 14 ... g5!? is an interesting alternative and after 15 fxg5 (15 g3 gxf4 16 gxf4 Bh3 17 Rf3 Kh8 and I prefer Black's chances as White's position seems to have holes everywhere) 15 ... Bxe5 (15 ... Nxg5!? 16 Be3 Ne4 17 N3d4 Bxe5 18 Nxe6 fxe6 is a right mess with mutual chances) 16 Bd3 Bg4 17 Qe1 Bxb2 18 Rb1 Bg7 with a complicated position.

b) 14 Bd3 Nxc3 15 bxc3 Bf5 16 Qe2 f6 17 exf6 exf6 18 Rae1 b6 19 Qf3 Bxd3 20 Qxd3 f5 21 Re2 Qd7 with, once again, mutual chances, E.Alekseev-K.Maslak, Moscow 2008.

12 Bg1 Rb8!? 13 a4

White's alternatives do not promise much at this juncture:

a) 13 Nd4 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 b5 15 e5 dxe5 16 fxe5 Nd7 17 Nxc6 (better is 17 Nd5 Ndxe5 18 Nxc6 Nxc6 19 Bxa7 Rb7 20 Bc5 with an even game) 17 ... Qxc6 18 Bxa7 Rb7 19 Bd4 b4 20 Ne4 Nxe5 and Black has taken control of the game, I.Glek-A.Khalifman, Moscow 1995.

b) 13 Nd5 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 Qe6 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 c3 Bg7 17 Rfe1 b5 and Black has every reason to be happy with the outcome of the opening, A.Galkin-A.Khalifman, Elista 1998.

13 ... b6 14 Nd4

14 Nd5 is a bit of misguided, premature aggression on White's part. Black gets a good game with 14 ... Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Qe6 16 Qd3 (16 Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Rab1 Rbc8 is obviously problem-free for Black) 16 ... Nxe4 17 Nc7 Qf5 18 g4 Qd7 19 Na6 Nc5 20 Nxb8 Rxb8 21 Bxc5 Qb7 22 Qe4 bxc5 and Black has ample compensation for the exchange, J.Kondali-G.Nesis, correspondence 1985.

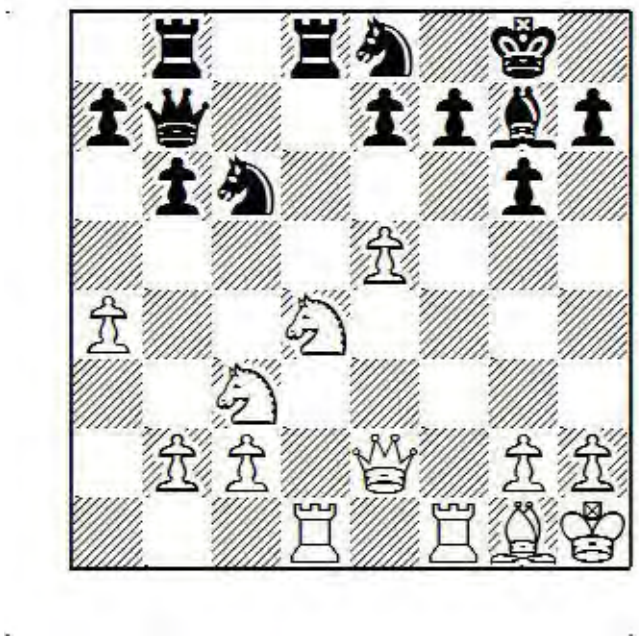
14 ... Bxe2 15 Qxe2 Rd8

A new move at the time of the game. Previously played was 15 ... Nd7 16 Nxc6 (Tiviakov suggests 16 Rad1 as a possible improvement, which seems right as after 16 ... Re8 17 f5, the position is quite pleasant for White) 16 ... Qxc6 17 Nd5 Rfe8 is solid and good for Black, D.Barua-J.Ehlvest, Calcutta 1999.

16 Rad1 Qb7 17 e5

White pushes forward in the centre. This is logical considering how well-placed the white pieces are. Possibly, a better option is 17 Nd5 Nxd4 18 Bxd4 e5 19 Nxf6+ Bxf6 20 Bc3 with a smudge of an initiative for White, but ultimately, Black should be fine.

17 ... dxe5 18 fxe5 Ne8



Exercise: What is White's best move?

19 Rxf7??

Answer: This looks terribly tempting, but it boils down to a miscalculation of some magnitude. I hope you didn't get similarly tempted when contemplating the options ahead of this move.

The alternatives are:

a) 19 Bf2 Nxd4 20 Bxd4 Nc7 followed by ... Ne6 with a pleasant game for Black.

b) 19 e6 f5 20 Nxc6 Qxc6 also looks good for Black; the pawn on e6 is quite weak.

c) White's best is undoubtedly 19 Nxc6!? Qxc6 20 Rxd8 Rxd8 21 Nb5 Rd7 22 Nd4 Qd5 23 Re1 e6 24 c4 followed by b2-b3 with at best a small advantage for White.

19 ... Nxd4

Of course not 19 ... Kxf7?? on the account of 20 Qc4+ e6 21 Qxe6+ Kf8 22 Rf1+ and it is curtains.

20 Rxg7+

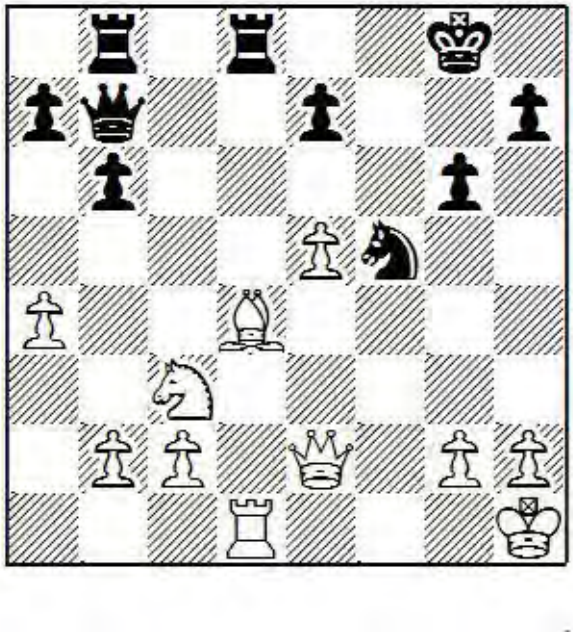
One commentator thought that Timman possibly intended 20 Qc4, but the former had missed that Black has 20 ... Qc6!, which ends any White hopes as after Rxg7+ Kxg7 22 Rxd4 Qxc4 23 Rxc4 Rbc8 24 Rf4 Rd2, Black should be winning.

Tiviakov suggests that 20 Bxd4 is best, but that is hardly the case, for instance 20 ... Kxf7 21 Qc4+ e6 22 Rf1+ Kg8 23 Qxe6+ Kh8 24 Rf7 Qc8 25 Qe7 h6 26 Bg1 Qc6 (followed by ... Rb8-c8-c7) has Black consolidating.

20 ... Nxg7 21 Bxd4

Trading rooks with 21 Rxd4 Rxd4 22 Bxd4 Qc6!? hardly constitutes an improvement over the game. Black will follow up with ... Ne6, ... Rf8 and ... Rf5, getting on course to notch up the win.

21 ... Nf5

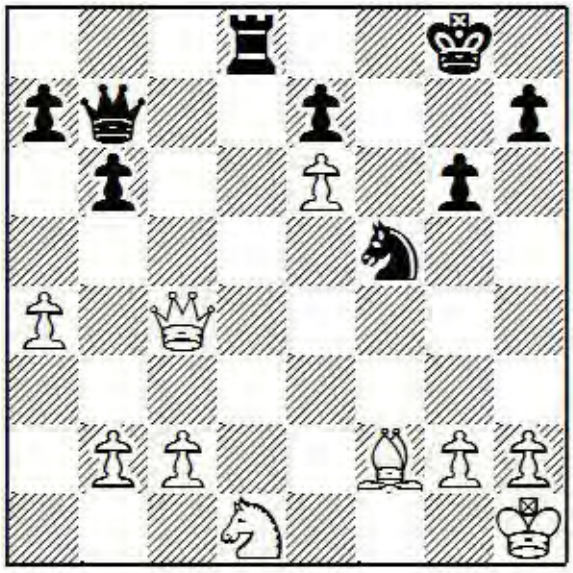


White's attack/initiative is running out of steam and he is running out of pieces to throw on the fire. With more exchanges around the corner, barring a blunder for Black, the game is over for White.

22 Qc4+

The computer prefers 22 Bg1 but after 22 ... Rxd1 23 Qxd1 Qc6 there isn't much fizz left in the soda.

22 ... Kg7 23 e6+ Kg8 24 Bf2 Rxd1+ 25 Nxd1 Rd8



At this point, Timman could have thrown the towel into the ring. But perhaps out of frustration with his blunder on the 19th move, he carried on for quite a while longer.

26 Nc3 Rd2 27 Qf4 Rxc2 28 h4 Qc8 29 Kg1 Qxe6 30 Ne4 Rc4 31 Qb8+ Kg7 32 Nc3 Nxh4 33 Qxa7 Rg4

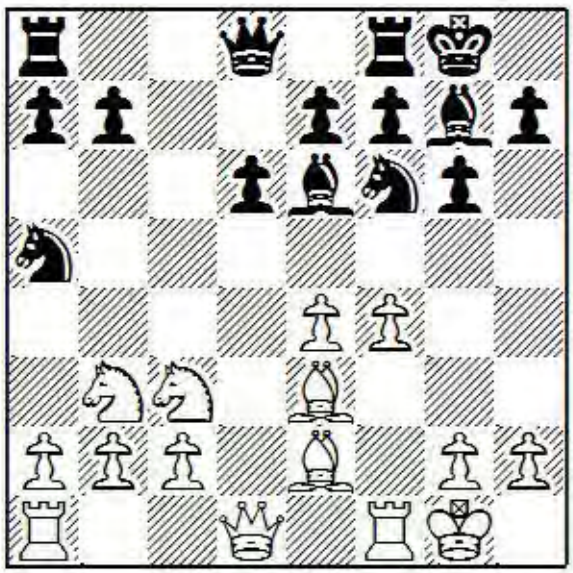
With precise moves, Black has built onto his advantage and the end is near.

34 g3 Qd6 35 Qb7 Nf5 36 Qf3 h5 37 Kh2 Kh7 38 b3 Qd2 39 Kh3 Qc1 40 Kh2 Qc2 41 Kh3 Qxb3 0-1

White finally decided to end the game.

Game 14
P.Negi-K.Grigoryan
Dubai 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Nb3 0-0 8 Be2 d6 9 0-0 Be6 10 f4 Na5



A very logical move which used to be my go-to move, until I 'discovered' 10 ... Rc8 (which we will cover in the next game).

Question: What is the point of sending the knight to the edge of the board?

Answer: Black threatens to send the knight or the bishop to c4 where they lend protection to one another. He also prepares to use the half-open c-file with ... Rc8. Nowadays, the knight sally isn't seen very often at master level but it remains playable.

11 f5

White has a couple of relevant alternatives here:

a) The centralising 11 Bd4 aims to drag Black out of the theoretical main lines. Let's have a look at the possibilities following this move:

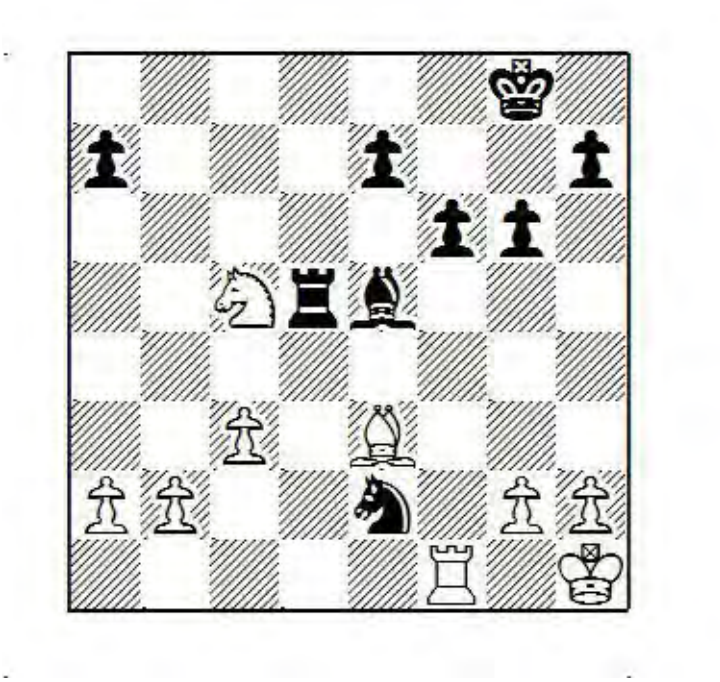
a1) Not 11 ... Nc4?? which loses a piece after 12 f5.

a2) After 11 ... Bc4, Tiviakov suggests 12 Nxa5 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Qxa5 14 Rad1 and White seems to have a slightly more pleasant position.

a3) Perhaps the best alternative is 11 ... Rc8 12 Bf3 (12 f5 Bc4 13 Bxa7 Bxe2 14 Qxe2 Nc4 15 Bd4 Nxb2 restores the material balance but I like Black's chances better on account of the pawn structure) 12 ... Nc4 13 Rb1 Qd7 14 a4 a6 15 h3 b5 16 axb5 axb5 17 Qe1 b4 18 Na2 Na5 19 Nxb4 Nxb3 20 cxb3 Bxb3, and if anything, Black has the slightly upper hand here, A.Kim-B.Macieja, Moscow 2008.

b) 11 Kh1 does not represent any kind of threat to Black and 11 ... Bc4 (11 ... Nc4 12 Bd4 Rc8 is a playable alternative) 12 e5 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 dxe5 14 fxe5 Nd5:

b1) The obvious but not very good 15 Rad1?! ran into 15 ... Nxc3! 16 Rxd8 (or 16 bxc3 Qc7 17 e6 fxe6 18 Rxf8+ Rxf8 19 Nc5 Qc6 and Black should be a little better, thanks to his extra pawn) 16 ... Nxe2 17 Rxa8 Rxa8 18 Nxa5 Bxe5. Here, Black is a pawn up, but the e2-knight seems to be in immediate danger of getting trapped. However, Black calculated accurately and in fact won rather quickly after 19 c3 Rd8 20 Nxb7 Rd3 21 Bh6 f6 22 Nc5?! Rd5 23 Be3??



Exercise: Black to play and win. Can you work it out?

Answer: The devastating 23 ... Bxh2! is the move to find. Even in the endgame, mating themes can arise! After 24 Re1 Bd6! (the e2-knight cannot be touched due to the weak back rank) 25 g4 Re5, White facing more material loss, had enough of the game and resigned, J.Timman-J.Hjartarson, Reykjavik 1988.

b2) The best way to challenge Black is 15 e6!? and after 15 ... Nxb3 16 exf7+ Rxf7 17 axb3 Rxf1+ 18 Rxf1 Nxe3 19 Qxe3 Qd6, we have an interesting middlegame with roughly equal chances. The bishop is somewhat better than the knight, but Black's pawns are a little more vulnerable.

11 ... Bd7?!

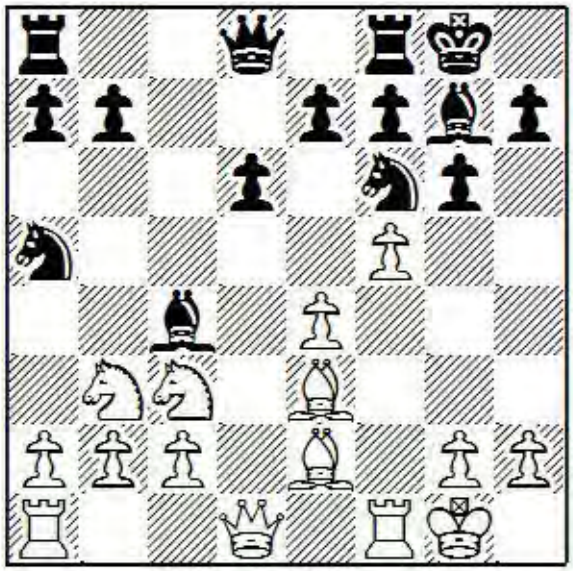
This is a surprising move for a number of reasons. Firstly, one of the ideas behind the previous move is that Black can answer 11 f5 with 11 ... Bc4. Moreover, it allows a reasonably forced sequence, resulting in a material distribution that cannot be unfavourable for White. However, clearly Grigoryan must have

thought otherwise to go this route.

Question: Why did Black retreat the bishop instead of sending it to c4?

Answer: Perhaps he rationalised that White's f4-f5 move has given him an e5-outpost for his knight as well as weakened White's e-pawn. Black therefore might have the opportunity to reroute his knight to e5 via ... Nc6 again.

The normal move and the main line is 11 ... Bc4.

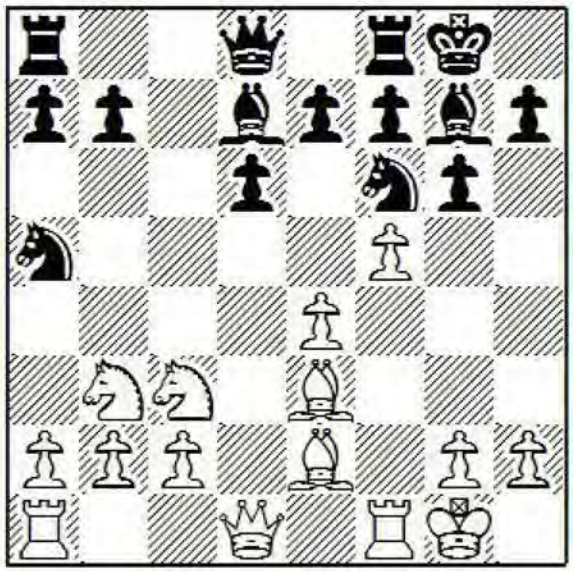


Now there are a couple of moves for us to look at:

a) 12 Bd3 is the main line. Safest and best is 12 ... Bxd3 13 cxd3 d5! 14 Nxa5 Qxa5 15 e5 (15 fxg6!? is an interesting alternative that is largely ignored in Dragon books and after 15 ... fxg6 16 e5 Nd7 17 d4 e6 18 Rxf8+ Rxf8 19 Qg4 Rf5 20 Qe2, White has a more comfortable position for White which he eventually converted, A.Galkin-S.Klimov, St Petersburg 1998) 15 ... d4 16 Bxd4 Nd7 17 f6 exf6 18 exf6 Bxf6 19 Bxf6 (19 Rxf6 Nxf6 20 Qf3 was played in Y.Rantanen-K.Helmers, Oslo 1978 and now 20 ... Nh5 Nd5 f6 appears to be better for Black (Gufeld gives 21 ... f5 with an unclear verdict) 19 ... Qb6+ 20 Kh1 Nxf6 21 Qf3 Kg7 and Black 's better pawn structure (fewer pawn islands) gives him the nod, A.Demkovich-G.Matjushin, Donetsk 2010.

b) 12 Nxa5 Bxe2 13 Qxe2 Qxa5 14 Bd4 (14 g4!? Qe5 15 Bf4 Qc5+ 16 Kh1 Qc6 17 g5 Nd7 is a more aggressive option for White, but here too Black is fine, J.Koch-R.Fontaine, France 2002) 14 ... Nd7 (14 ... Rac8 has been played several times, but White obtains a better position with simple means via 15 Rad1 Nd7 16 Nd5 Rfe8 17 c3 and White has an enduring initiative) 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Nd5 (16 Kh1 Qe5 on the other hand, is pleasant for Black, Mo.Cetkovic-M.Jovicic, Yugoslavia 1994) 16 ... e6! (16 ... Nf6 is given as equal by Gufeld, but White's chances just look superior after the straightforward 17 c4! Qc5+ 18 Kh1 Qd4 19 fxg6 hxg6 20 Nxf6 exf6 21 Rad1 and Black has a dreary position, B.Milic-A.Matanovic, Zagreb 1953) 17 b4 Qd8 18 fxe6 fxe6 19 Rxf8 Nxf8 20 Ne3 Qb6 gives rise to a complex position with approximately equal chances.

Let's get back to 11 ... Bd7.



Exercise: Can White take advantage of Black's flagrant tempo-wasting bishop retreat? What is the best move for the former?

Answer: **12 e5!**

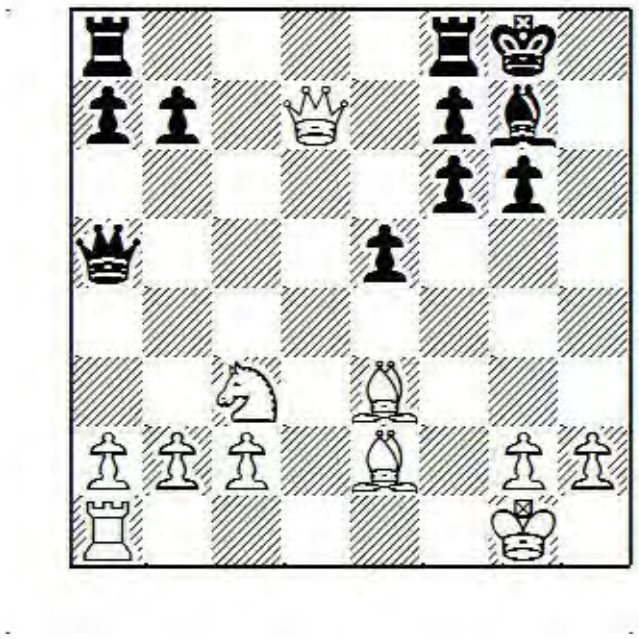
White takes the bait with this temporary pawn sacrifice, using the opportunity to gain material or at least create a material imbalance.

Let's look at other moves first:

a) Of interest is the fact that another strong grandmaster decided to avoid this line and instead went for the decidedly more solid 12 Kh1 Qc7 13 Bd4 (White again avoids the opportunity to change the nature of the game with 13 fxg6 hxg6 14 e5 dxe5 15 Nxa5 Qxa5 16 Rxf6 exf6 17 Qxd7 as in our main game) 13 ... Bc6 (Black can also consider 13 ... Nxb3!? 14 axb3 Bc6 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 Nd7 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Qd2 Ne5, leading to a position that can end up being difficult for Black pawn structure-wise. However, in this case the knight on e5 provides a great deal of compensation. Black can easily end up with a very passive position without any counterplay) 14 Bd3 Nxb3 (14 ... a6 15 Nd2 e5 16 fxe6 fxe6) 15 axb3 Nd7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Rf3 Ne5 18 Rh3 f6 19 Qd2 g5 20 Bc4 Rh8 21 Be6 h5 22 Rg3 h4, and now rather than 23 Re3? (White should have played the sharp 23 Rxg5+! fxg5 24 Qxg5+ Kf8 25 f6 Ke8 26 Qg7 Rf8, and now 27 Rf1! is the strongest, intending 27 ... Nf7 28 Nd5 Bxd5 29 exd5 exf6 30 Re1!, which forces 30 ... Qe7 31 Bxf7+ Rxf7 32 Qh8+ Kd7 33 Rxe7+ Rxe7 34 Qxh4, and White has excellent winning chances in the queen vs 2 rooks endgame) 23 ... Ng4 which was perfectly fine for Black; White's initiative is out of the window, S.Rublevsky-A.Areshchenko, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

b) 12 Bd4 Nc6 13 Be3 Ne5 14 a4 Bc6 15 Bd3 d5! 16 exd5 Nxd5, and White has trouble keeping everything properly guarded, C.O'Shaughnessy-J.Gallagher, London 1994. This line best reflects the rationale of Black playing 11 ... Bd7 as explained earlier.

12 ... dxe5 13 fxg6 hxg6 14 Nxa5 Qxa5 15 Rxf6 exf6 16 Qxd7



Question: Who has benefitted from the 'combination' White played?

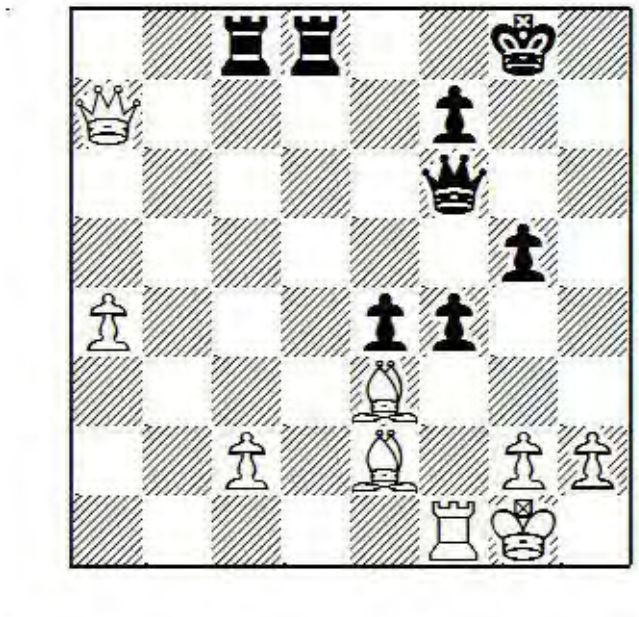
Answer: Black must have considered this position playable when he played 11 ... Bd7, factoring in his central pawn mass to count for something. Nevertheless, this position looks promising for White if he can maintain an initiative with his minor pieces and prevent Black from getting his e- and f-pawns rolling.

16 ... Rad8

My computer considers this move inaccurate, instead giving preference to 16 ... Rfd8, which White can meet in a couple of ways:

a) 17 Qxb7 Rab8 18 Qc6 Rdc8 19 Qa4 Qxa4 20 Nxa4 Rxc2 21 Bd1 Rc7 22 Bb3 should be better for White as well, but there's a long way home and the black e- and f-pawns may soon make their entrance into the battle, muddling things up further.

b) 17 Qe7 Rac8 (the move order is important as 17 ... f5 18 Bc4 Rf8 19 Rd1 and Black is losing as he cannot get out of White's stranglehold on the position) 18 Rb1 f5 19 Qxb7 e4 20 Qxa7 Bxc3 21 bxc3 Qxc3 22 Rc1 Qf6 23 a4 f4 24 Rf1 g5 with a complex position.



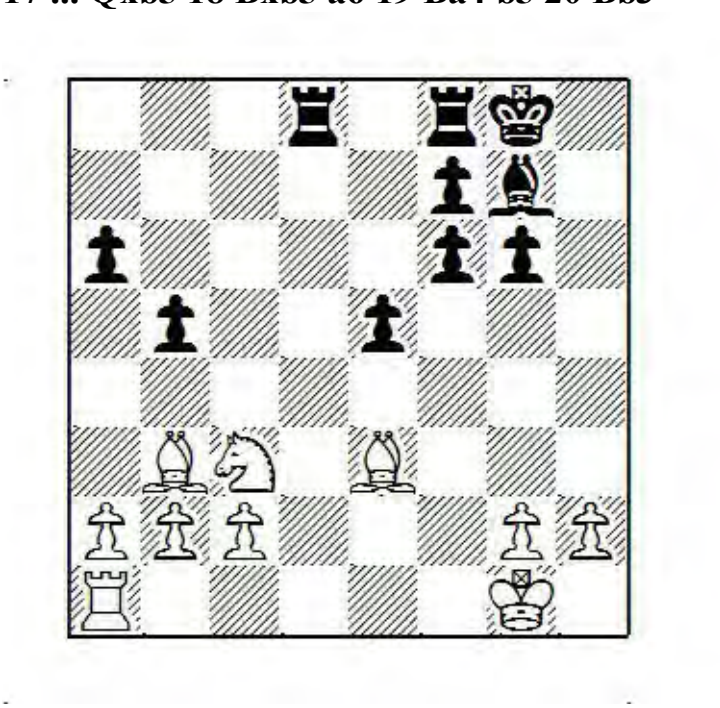
This might be playable for Black. In any case, it is quite complicated, even if I prefer White due to his

material advantage.

17 Qb5!?

Exchanging queens looks like a direct way for White to consolidate his advantage. The alternative 17 Qxb7 is also intriguing. After 17 ... Rb8 18 Qd5 Qxd5 19 Nxd5 and now 19 ... Rxb2 20 Bc4! Rxc2 21 Bb3 Rb2 (there are no other usable squares available) 22 Kf1!, the rook is left stranded, forcing Black to play the radical 22 ... Rb8 23 Bc1 R2xb3 24 axb3 Rxb3 25 Be3 when White should have excellent winning chances.

17 ... Qxb5 18 Bxb5 a6 19 Ba4 b5 20 Bb3



Nominally speaking, the material balance is about even (a knight and bishop is worth about the same as a rook and pawn). However, Black's queenside pawns are very vulnerable and it can become difficult for Black to keep control over the position. The f7-pawn is also a target if White can get a rook to the 7th rank followed by Bc5. Black's counterplay will have to consist of pushing the e5- and f6-pawns forward and hope for White to create a weakness or two to play against. This strategy does not seem particularly promising.

20 ... f5 21 Nd5 Rd7 22 Bg5

I like the alternative 22 Rd1 Kh8 23 c3 which also looks good for White. However, the Indian grandmaster behind the white pieces prefers to prod and probe, to get Black to weaken his position further without allowing any kind of useful, active counterplay.

22 ... Kh8 23 Rf1

Threatening Rf1-f3-h3+, illustrating that even with four pawns in front of the king, it can still be vulnerable.

23 ... e4?!

This looks more or less forced, but Black could consider 23 ... f6 24 Bc1 f4 25 Rf3 Bh6 26 Rh3 Kg7, but White is still a bit better after 27 Bd2 Rfd8 28 Rd3.

24 c3 Be5 25 Be7

The immediate 25 g4! is also worth considering.

25 ... Rb8 26 g4!

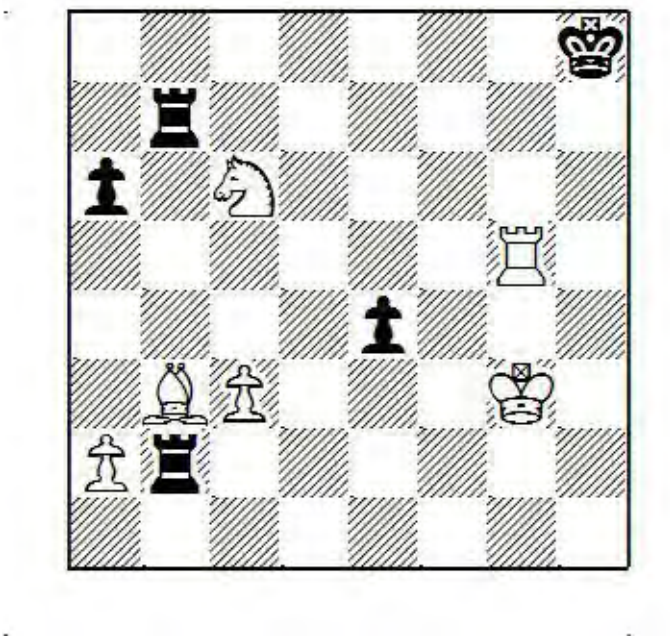
Creating a crisis in Black's pawn mass.

26 ... Rbb7 27 Bg5 b4

This initiates another sequence of exchanges. Alternatively, 27 ... fxg4 allows White to force a

favourable change in the material imbalance with 28 Nf6 Bxf6 29 Bxf6+, leaving White with a bishop pair against the rook. White is clearly better after 29 ... Kh7 30 Rf4 Rd6 31 Be5 Rd2 32 Rxg4 with excellent winning chances.

28 Nxb4 f6 29 Nc6 Bxh2+ 30 Kxh2 fxg5 31 gxf5 Rd2+ 32 Kg3 gxf5 33 Rxf5 Rxb2 34 Rxg5



White has won a pawn, but the position has been considerably simplified. Thus, great accuracy from White is required to reel in the point. White must prevent Black from sacrificing his rook for a minor piece and both of White's pawns. Right now this is not possible. For example, after 34 ... R2xb3 35.axb3 Rxb3 36.Rc5!, White wins easily.

34 ... Rc7 35 Bd5! Rc2

If Black tries 35 ... e3 36 Re5 e2 37 Kf2 Rd2 38 c4 e1Q+ 39 Kxe1 Rxa2, White should win after 40 Re2.

36 c4 Rxa2

Let's take a quick look at Black's alternatives:

a) 36 ... e3 37 Re5 Rxa2 38 Rxe3 Rc2 39 Re4 and White should by transferring his king to d6.

b) 36 ... Rg7 37 Rxg7 Kxg7 38 Kf4 Rxa2 39 c5! and now 39 ... Rc2 is met by 40 Nd4! and the c-pawn cannot be touched due to a Ne6-fork.

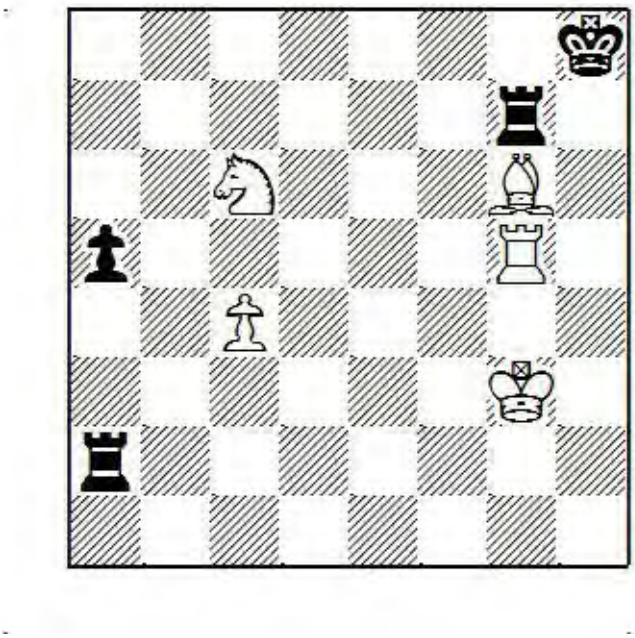
37 Bxe4?!

Better is 37 Kf4 Rd2 38 Kxe4.

37 ... Rg7 38 Bg6

There is no need to allow the rooks to be exchanged just yet.

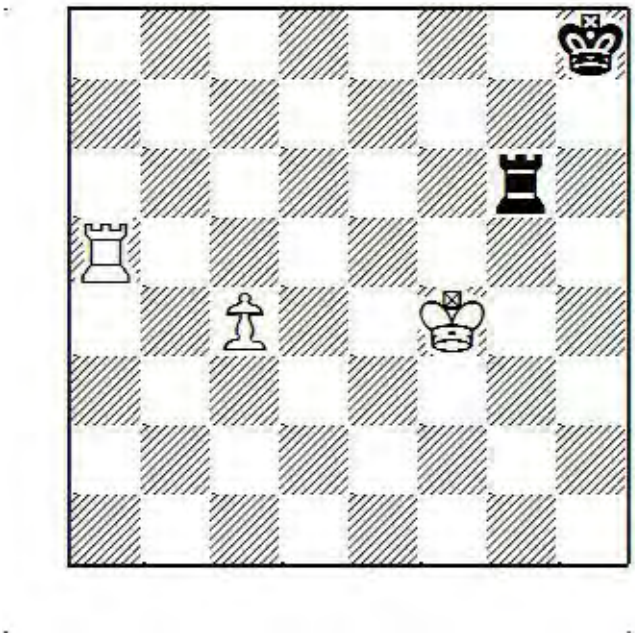
38 ... a5!?



39 Nxa5?

This is completely unnecessary as it allows Black to reach a drawn endgame. It is entirely possible that both players were in time trouble at this point and simply were banging moves away to safely reach the time control. The better move is 39 Kf4 a4 40 Rh5+ Kg8 41 Be4 where the combination of rook, knight, bishop and passed c-pawn will cause plenty of headaches for Black.

39 ... Rxa5 40 Rxa5 Rxg6+ 41 Kf4



41 ... Rc6??

An unbelievable blunder by the Armenian grandmaster. Black throws a crucial tempo away. The only(!) move to save the draw is 41 ... Kg8! 42 c5 (42 Rf5 is met by 42 ... Re6! 43 c5 Kg7 and White cannot make any progress) 42 ... Kf7 43 Ra7+ Ke8 44 Ke5 Kd8, and Black is reaching the desired defensive position for this type of endgame. Black keeps the rook on the sixth rank, until the pawn is pushed to c6, at which point the rook goes deep. For illustration purposes, let's continue a bit. After 45 Kd5 Kc8 46 Rf7 Rh6 47 Kc4 Rg6 48 Kb5 Rh6 49 c6 Rh1, Black will start checking from the first rank, preventing White from making any progress.

42 c5 Kg7 43 Ke5 Kf7 44 Kd5 Rh6 45 Ra7+??

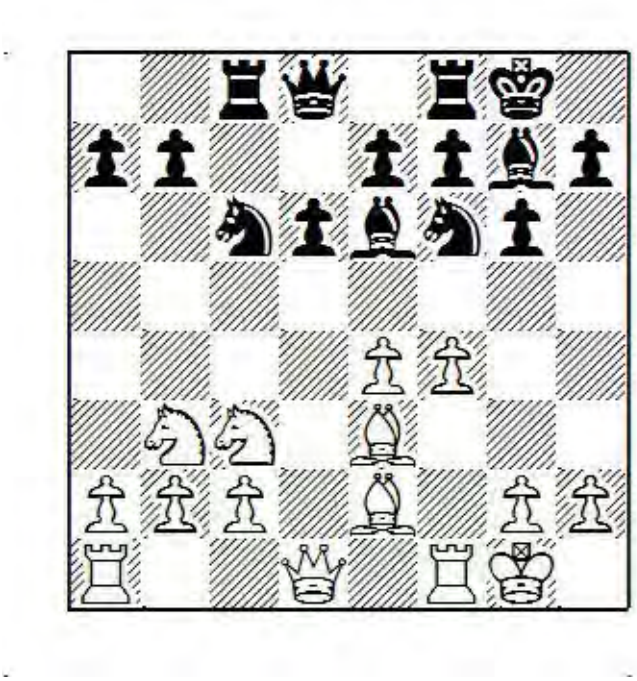
And now it is White's turn to blunder. The only move to win is 45 Rb5! Ke8 46 Rb6! Rh1 47 Rd6 and with Black's king cut off, White wins easily. For instance, 47 ... Rg1 48 Kc6 Rc1 49 Kb6 Ke7 50 Rd3 Rb1+ 51 Kc7 Ra1 52 c6 Rc1 53 Kb7 Rb1+ 54 Kc8 Rb2 55 c7 Rb1 56 Re3+ Kf7 (56 ... Kd6 57 Kd8), and now White builds 'the bridge' with 57 Re4 Kf6 58 Kd7 Rd1+ 59 Kc6 Rc1+ 60 Kd6 Rd1+ 61 Kc5 Rc1+ 62 Rc4 . This, along with the defensive method mentioned in the note to Black's 41st move, is something all chess players should know by heart.

45 ... Ke8 46 c6 Kd8 47 Kc5 Rh1 48 Rg7 Kc8 ½-½

White sees no reason to continue this any further, and a draw was agreed.

Game 15
A.Kovalev-Ca.Hansen
Gausdal 1990

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be2 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Be3 Nc6 9 Nb3 Be6 10 f4 Rc8



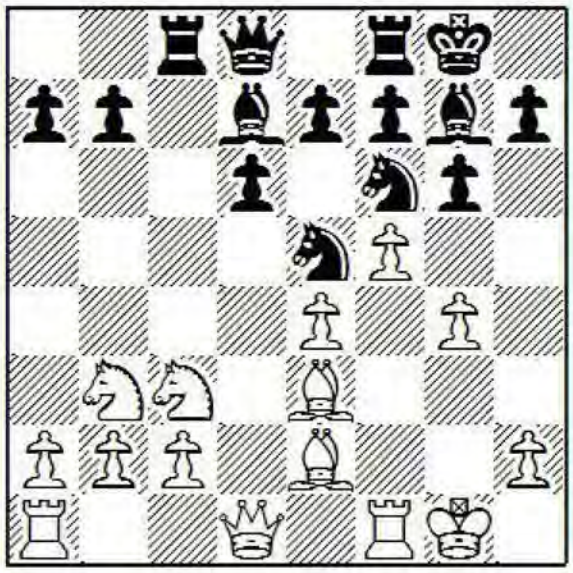
This move was first played by Chekhover back in 1933, but then it largely disappeared until the late 1980s and early 1990s when in particular it caught traction in Hungarian circles. Nowadays it is pretty much the main line. The text move discourages White from playing f4-f5 for reasons we will cover below.

11 Kh1

Alternatives to consider are:

a) 11 f5? Bd7, and now White has several options:

a1) The rationale behind ... Rc8 is clearly illustrated after the terribly loosening 12 g4? Ne5.



Black can execute the stock exchange sacrifice ... Rxc3 favourably after 13 Bd4, 13 Nd2 or 13 Bxa7. Thus, there is no good reason to encourage the knight to the e5-outpost as well as clear the queen rook's path on the c-file.

a2) 12 Qe1 is a more solid option and after 12 ... a6 13 Qh4 Ne5 14 g4?! Rxc3 15 bxc3 Nxe4 16 Bd4 Bf6 17 Qe1 gxf5 18 gxf5 Kh8, a draw was agreed despite the fact that Black is almost winning in S.Novikov-E.Gasanov, Moscow 2006. White's king is awfully weakened and it will not have many places to hide. Black's pieces on the other hand either are active or will be ideally placed within a few moves.

a3) 12 Kh1 is another decent continuation though after 12 ... Ne5 13 Bd4 Bc6 14 Nd2 Qa5 (14 ... Qc7!? 15 Qe1 a6 16 Rd1 b5 is also pleasant for Black) 15 a3 Rfd8 16 Qe1 Qc7 17 Qg3 b6 18 Rae1 Qb7 19 Qh4 b5 20 b4 a6, Black certainly doesn't have any problems, B.Kamber-K.Znamenacek, Prague 1991.

b) 11 Bf3 is yet another less confrontational and non-threatening continuation and perhaps Black's best is the knight sally 11 ... Nd7!? when 12 Qe1 Nb6 13 Rd1?! (13 f5 Bc4 14 Rf2 Ba6 looks a little odd for Black, but once the knights jump to the c4- and b4-squares respectively, Black's position begins to look promising) 13 ... Nb4 14 Qf2 Nc4 gives White problems in keeping his queenside pawns guarded, for example after 15 Bc1 Nxb2 16 Bxb2 Bxc3 17 Bxc3 Rxc3 and Black is just a pawn up, L.Rosanov-S.Veselovsky, Moscow 1994.

c) 11 Rb1 a6 12 Bf3 b5 13 Nd5 Nd7 14 c3 a5 15 Nd4 Bxd5 16 exd5 Nxd4 17 Bxd4 Bxd4+ 18 Qxd4 Qb6 19 Qxb6 Nxb6 is assessed as equal by my computer but Black's position is considerably more comfortable with the better minor piece, A.Galkin-Y.Yakovich, St.Petersburg 1995.

d) 11 Qd2 a6 12 Nd4 Nxd4 13 Bxd4 Qa5 14 Bf3 (14 Rad1 Bc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 Qd3 Rfc8 is naturally also fine for Black) 14 ... Rc4 15 Be3 Rfc8 16 Qf2 b5 17 f5 Bd7 and Black is again comfortably, C.Paglilla-J.Cortes, Ibercaja 1992.

11 ... a6

Black prepares ... Na5 as well as ... b7-b5, while eliminating any possibility of White capturing the a7-pawn. It isn't strictly necessary, but I think it is best even if several strong players have done without it.

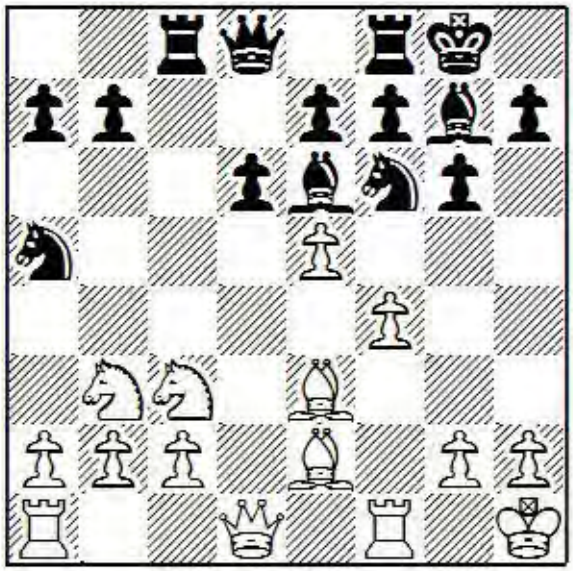
The key alternative is 11 ... Na5, intending to send the knight directly to c4, and now White has tried:

a) 12 f5 Bc4 (12 ... Nc4!? 13 Bd4 Bd7 is also playable) 13 Bd3 a6 14 Qe1 Bxd3 15 cxd3 Nxb3 16 axb3 d5! with equal chances in an interesting middlegame, S.Kindermann-M.Cebalo, Munich 1989.

b) 12 Nxa5?! Qxa5 13 Bd4 Bc4 14 a3 e5 15 fxe5 (15 Be3 exf4 16 Bxf4 Bxe2 17 Qxe2 d5 is also fine for Black according to Rogozenco) 15 ... dxe5 16 Bf2 Be6 17 Bd3 Nh5 18 Re1 and a draw was agreed in P.Svidler-V.Kramnik, Belgrade 1999, even only Black can be better at this point.

c) 12 Nd2 a6 (12 ... d5!? 13 f5 Bxf5 14 exf5 d4 looks like an attractive alternative for Black) 13 f5 Bc4 14 Nxc4 Nxc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 Qd3 b5 17 a4 Qc8 18 axb5 axb5 and Black has equalised, C.Gonzales-S.Videki, Badalona 1995.

d) 12 e5!? is the principled choice and the only way to challenge Black's decision to play 12 ... Na5 before playing ... a7-a6.



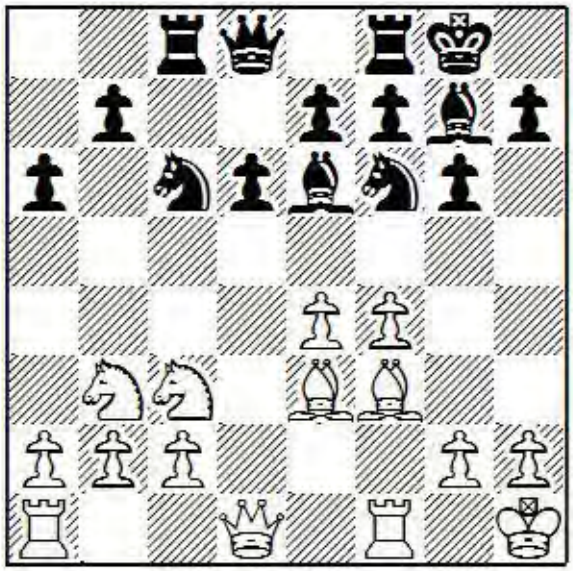
Black needs to avoid a couple of pitfalls:

d1) 12 ... Nxb3? is met by 13 exf6!, winning material.

d2) 12 ... dxe5?? 13 Qxd8 Rfxd8 14 Nxa5 obviously isn't an option for Black either.

d3) 12 ... Ne8 13 Bxa7 (13 exd6 Nxd6 14 Nd4 Ndc4 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 Bxc4 Nxc4 is clearly better for Black as his pieces are all ideally placed and White will be lucky to avoid losing material, H.Holmsgaard-M.Matthiesen, Aarhus 1999) 13 ... Nxb3 14 axb3 dxe5 15 Bf3 (15 Qxd8 Rxd8 16 fxe5 Bxe5 17 Bf3 Nd6 is probably the most accurate continuation) 15 ... Qxd1 16 Rfxd1 exf4 17 Bxb7 Rc7 18 Be4 Nf6 19 Bb6?? (19 Bf3 is of course much better, although I prefer Black with his five pawns versus two pawns majority on the kingside/centre) 19 ... Rxc3 20 bxc3 Nxe4 and Black is easily winning, J.Fluvia Poyatos-A.Romero Holmes, Banyoles 2001.

12 Bf3



Question: This doesn't seem quite threatening. What is White trying to accomplish?

Answer: White is simply trying to reach an even, playable position from which he can outplay his much lower-rated opponent. One key point of this move is to meet the queenside advance 12 ... b5 with 13 Nd5 (with the e-pawn defended), exerting good central control.

Although the continuation in our main game is reasonably harmless for Black, none of the alternatives

should worry Black either:

a) 12 Qe1 b5 13 Rd1 Nd7 14 f5 Bxb3?! (I don't like this move very much as it seems to hand White the initiative though after 14 ... Bc4 15 Bxc4 bxc4 16 Nd4 Nxd4 17 Bxd4 Bxd4 18 Rxd4 Qb6 19 Qd2 Nf6, chances are about equal) 15 cxb3 Nce5 16 Bd4 Nc6 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 a4 and White has the better chances, P.Negi-Y.Kryvoruchko, Tromso 2013.

b) 12 f5?! Bd7 13 Qe1 (13 g4? Ne5 14 g5 Rxc3! 15 bxc3 Nxe4 and the white position is completely collapsing) 13 ... Ne5 14 Rd1 b5 15 Bd3 b4 16 Ne2 a5 17 Qh4 Qc7 18 Nbd4 Qb7 19 Bg5 a4 and Black clearly is in charge, L.Butkiewicz-E.Andreev, Olomouc 2011.

12 ... Na5

Black proceeds as intended, but he has a couple of full-good alternatives at this point:

a) 12 ... Bc4 13 Rf2 b5 14 Rd2 Qc7, P.Ofstad-E.Gausel, Gausdal 1995 and now 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 exd5 Nb8 17 c3 Nd7 is about even.

b) 12 ... Nd7 when White has tried:

b1) 13 Rb1 Bc4 (13 ... Bxc3 14.bxc3 b5 is also worth a thought) 14 Rf2 b5 15 e5 b4 16 Ne4 was J.Gallagher-B.Alterman, London Lloyds 1994 and here 16 ... dxe5 17 Rd2 Ncb8 18 Nec5 Rc7 looks promising for Black.

b2) 13 Rf2 Nb6 14 Qe2 Bc4 (14 ... Bxc3 15 bxc3 Na4 is a promising alternative) 15 Qe1 Be6 16 Qe2 Bc4 17 Qe1 Be6 18 Rd1 and here, White decides to deviate and avoid the draw by repetition, but Black is comfortable nonetheless following 18 ... Nc4 19 Bc1 b5 (my computer likes 19 ... Bd7 to prevent White from playing Nc5. He will continue with ... b7-b5 with a pleasant position) 20 Nc5 Nd4 21 Nxe6 Nxf3 22 Nxd8 Nxe1, and rather than 23 Nxf7 Rxf7 24 Rxe1 Nxb2! with a better game for Black, P.Svidler-P.H.Nielsen, Gausdal 1992, White should have played 23 Nd5 with perhaps a tiny edge.

13 e5

White decides to become ambitious, trying to pose some problems for Black to solve. In an earlier game, White went for the simpler 13 Nxa5 Qxa5 14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 exd5 but after 15 ... Bf5 16 c3 b5 17 a3 Qa4 18 Qd2 Qc2 19 Rad1, it was clear that Black doesn't have any problems and a draw was agreed in L.Vogt-R.Tischbierek, Dresden 1985.

13 ... Ne8 14 Nxa5?!

The first of a couple inaccurate White moves. The correct continuation is 14 Qe1 and then 14 ... dxe5 (14 ... b5!? 15 Rd1 Nc4 16 Bc1 Qb6 looks like the normal 'Dragon' continuation and is also okay for Black) 15 fxe5 Bxe5 16 Rd1 Qc7 17 Nc5 Ng7 reaches a complex position where I probably would prefer Black.

14 ... Qxa5 15 Bg4?!

White aspires to play f4-f5 at some point and probably feels the exchange of the light-squared bishops would help the process, but it instead gives Black the better chances. The alternative is 15 Bxb7 although after 15 ... Rb8 16 Bd5 Rxb2 17 Bd4 Rb8 18 Bxe6 fxe6 19 Qe2 Nc7!, Black should be better.

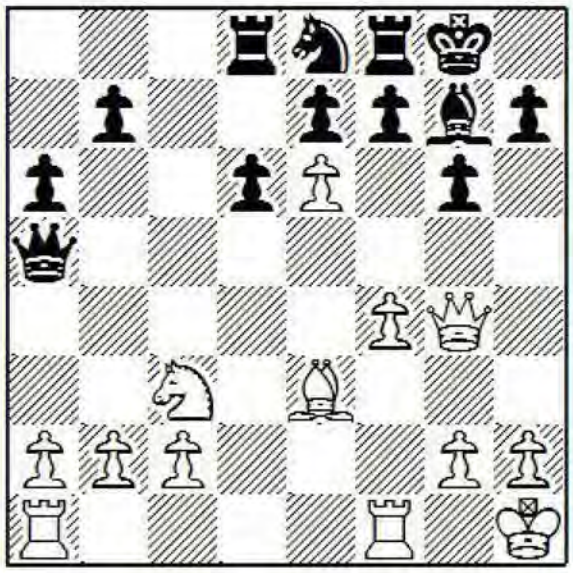
15 ... Bxg4 16 Qxg4 Rd8

Black opts for safety though he has other options:

a) Also playable is 16 ... Rc6!? but somewhat a little clumsy-looking. Now 17 Rad1 is simply countered with 17 ... e6 with Black having the edge.

b) However, the immediate 16 ... e6! is possibly best, deflating any White f4-f5 ideas. If White allows his e5-pawn to be exchanged, then Black's Dragon bishop becomes a monster.

17 e6



White prevents ... e7-e6 and prepares the f4-f5 spike.

Exercise: What is Black's strongest move?

17 ... Qf5

Black is not being ballsy enough. This safety-first move isn't becoming of Black's chances.

Answer: The correct way to punish White was 17 ... Bxc3! which for some reason didn't even strike me during the game. After 18 bxc3 Qxc3 19 exf7+ Rxf7, and Black is a pawn up and White's compensation is nowhere in sight. Once again, one must not be dogmatic about keeping the Dragon bishop intact.

Another strong alternative is 17 ... f5 18 Qh4 Bf6 19 Qf2 Rc8 and White has trouble keeping everything covered.

18 Qxf5

Also. after 18 exf7+ Rxf7 19 Qxf5 Rxf5 20 g4 Rf8 21 Bd2 Rc8, Black is doing rather well.

18 ... gxf5 19 Bb6 Ra8

Less accurate is 19 ... Rc8, which runs into 20 Nd5 Bf6 21 exf7+ Kxf7 22 c3 e6 23 Nxf6 Nxf6 with a satisfactory position for Black but the game continuation is better.

20 Rae1

Black is better after 20 exf7+ Kxf7 21 Nd1 Nf6 22 c3 Nd5 23 Bg1 b5.

20 ... Nf6

Once again Black should considered exchanging on c3. After 20 ... Bxc3! 21 bxc3 Nf6 22 Bd4 Ne4 23 exf7+ Rxf7 24 g4 Rc8, Black is in the driver's seat.

21 Bd4 Rac8 22 Nd1 Ne4 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 exf7 Rxc2?!

While completely playable and defensible, Black now unnecessarily enters a sequence of moves which leading to an endgame that requires accurate play. A perfectly solid alternative that looks rather promising for Black is the careful 24 ... e6 25 Re2 Rxf7, and with the knight solidly posted in the centre and nicely supported by at least one pawn, I would definitely have to prefer Black's chances.

25 Ne3 Rxb2 26 Nxf5+ Kf6 27 Rxe4 Kxf5 28 Rxe7 Kf6 29 Rfe1 Rxf7 30 R1e6+ Kg7 31 g4 Rxa2 32 f5

If White has to pose any kind of problems, this is the way to go. After 32 Rxf7+ Kxf7 33 Rxd6, Black doesn't have many issues hanging on to a draw after Rb2 34 Rd7+ Kf6 35 Rxh7 a5 36 g5+ Kf5 37 Rf7+ Kg6 (even 37 ... Kg4 is possible) 38 Rf6+ Kg7 39 f5 a4 40 Rg6+ Kf7 41 Rf6+ Kg7 with a draw by repetition.

32 ... b5

Putting the queenside pawns in motion makes perfect sense. An alternative way to defend is 32 ... Rc2 and now 33 Rxf7+ Kxf7 34 Rh6 Kg7 35 Rxd6 Rc7 (the idea behind 32 ... Rc2) 36 Rd8 Kf6 when Black should be able to defend. This is possibly a better option for Black considering how difficult the defence soon becomes.

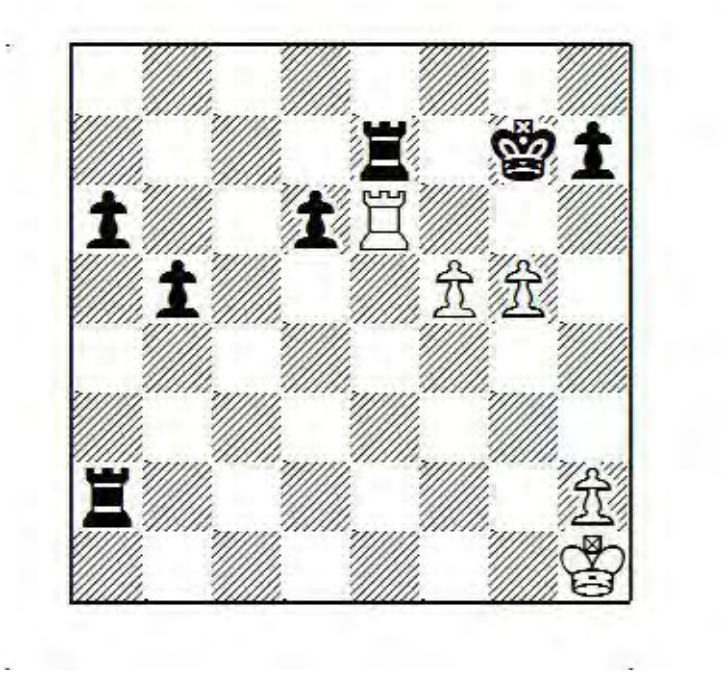
33 g5

So far, so good. White has pushed on to create problems for his lower-rated opponent, who has done his best to not mess up.

Also 33 f6+ requires accurate defence from Black, for instance after 33 ... Kg6 34 g5 a5 35 Rxf7 Kxf7 36 Re7+ Kg8 37 Rg7+ Kh8 38 Rb7 Kg8 39 h4 Ra4! (39 ... b4? 40 Rg7+ Kf8 41 Rxh7 just loses for Black) 40 Rg7+ Kh8 41 Kg2 (41 h5 Rh4+ 42 Kg2 Rxh5 43 Kg3 b4 44 Kg4 Rh2 45 Kf5 Rc2 46 g6 hxg6+ 47 Kxg6 Rg2+ 48 Kf7 Rh2 holds up fine for Black) 41 ... Rxh4 42 Kf3 a4 43 Rb7 Kg8 44 Rxb5 a3 45 Ra5 Rh1 46 Ra8+ Kf7 47 Ra7+ Kf8 48 Ke4 Ra1 49 Rxh7 Rg1 50 Kf5 a2 51 g6 Rf1+ 52 Kg5 Rg1+ with a draw. I know this was a very long variation, some of forced, some of it not so forced. Nevertheless, even after analysing this endgame at length, I haven't found any way of winning for White. But it is good for one's understanding to analyse such endgames.

33 ... Rxe7?

Now Black starts making serious mistakes, throwing away ill-affordable tempi. Black holds on after the accurate 33 ... Rf2! 34 f6+ Kg6 35 Rxd6 Rxe7 36 fxe7+ Kf7 37 Rxa6 Kxe7 38 Ra7+ Ke6 39 Rxh7 Rf5! (attacking the pawn, thus gaining time to get his own pawn into motion, creating timely counterplay) 40 h4 b4 41 Kg2 Rb5 42 Ra7 Kf5 43 Kf3 b3 44 Ra1 Rb6 45 Ke3 b2 46 Rb1 Rb4 and the draw becomes evident.



34 Rxe7+?

This is not the best. Black would likely be losing after the more precise 34 f6+ Kf8 35 Rxe7 Kg8 36 Rg7+ Kh8 37 Rb7. For instance, after 37 ... Kg8 38 Kg1 Ra5 39 h4 Ra4 40 Rg7+ Kh8 41 h5, it becomes clear that Black's defence collapses following 41 ... Rg4+ 42 Kh2 Rh4+ 43 Kg3 Rxh5 44 Kg4 Rh1 45 Kf5 Rc1 46 g6 hxg6+ 47 Kxg6 and despite his extra pawns, Black is without a defence. In comparison with the line given in the note after White's 33rd move, Black's pawns are further back and cannot provide any source of counterplay.

34 ... Kg8 35 f6 b4??

This is the critical mistake. While it seems appealing to 'create counterplay, this move is also a critical

loss of time when Black cannot afford such luxuries. Black can save his skin with the very precise 35 ... Rf2! 36 Rg7+ Kh8 37 Rf7 Kg8 38 Rg7+ Kh8 39 h4 h6 40 Rd7 hxg5 41 hxg5 Rf5 42 Rxd6 Rxg5 43 Rxa6 and a draw is around the corner.

36 Rg7+ Kf8?!

Strictly speaking everything is pretty ugly at this point. Black cannot save himself with 36 ... Kh8 as White will win after 37 Rb7 Kg8 38 Rxb4 Rf2 39 Rb8+ Kf7 40 Rb7+ Kg8 41 Rg7+ Kh8 42 Kg1 Rf5 43 Kg2 d5 44 Kg3 d4 45 h4.

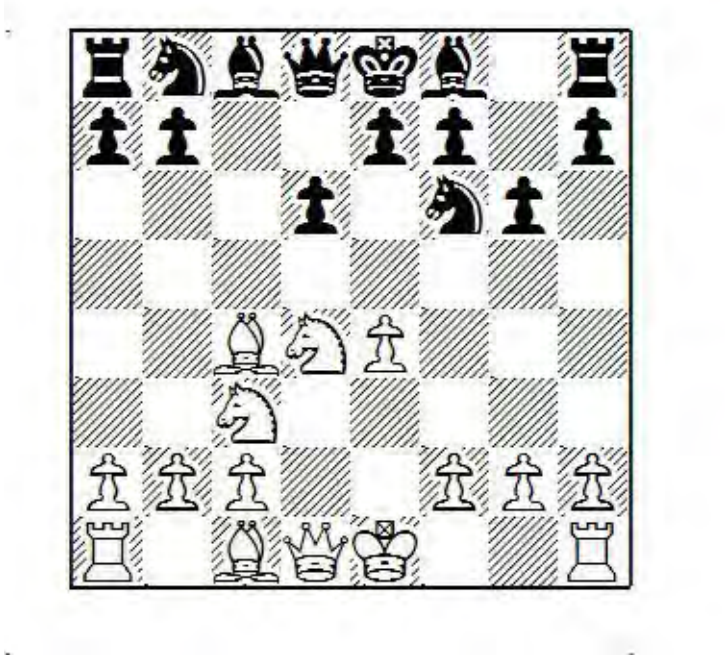
37 Rxh7

It is game over for Black. The white pawns are further advanced and far more dangerous than Black's. For the rest of the game, Black tosses his only muscle, the rook, around to hopefully create a little confusion. But White doesn't let himself get rattled out of his certain win.

37 ... Rf2 38 Rb7 Rf5 39 h4 Rf4 40 Kg2 Rxh4 41 Kg3 Rh1 42 Kg4 1-0

Chapter Three
Bc4 Lines

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Bc4

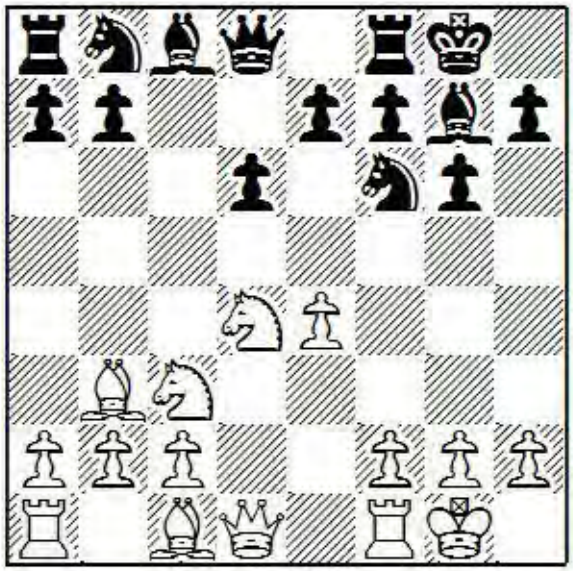


There are several renditions of the Bc4 lines. White can choose a variety of set-ups all of which have their individual purposes and ideas, which makes the Bc4 a tougher line for Black to master than it is for White to play. Furthermore, the Bc4 set-up is really a way for White to avoid the heavily theoretical Yugoslav Attack and the somewhat boring Classical main lines the latter of which all offer nothing against a reasonably well-prepared opponent.

We have discussed a little finesse with 6 Bc4 in Game 10 (with regards to a transposition to the Be2, Re1, Bf1 line) in the previous chapter. In Game 16, White utilises a tricky move order, which Black has to be careful against in 6 Bc4 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Bb3, especially if Black embarks on a stereotyped ... a7-a6, ... b7-b5 advance. Following that, in Game 17, we examine another set-up for White (arrived at via transposition from the Accelerated Dragon) stemming from 6 Bc4 Bg7 7 Be3 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 h3, which is a lot less dangerous for Black.

Game 16
R.Pokorna-T.Gelashvili
Thessaloniki 2007

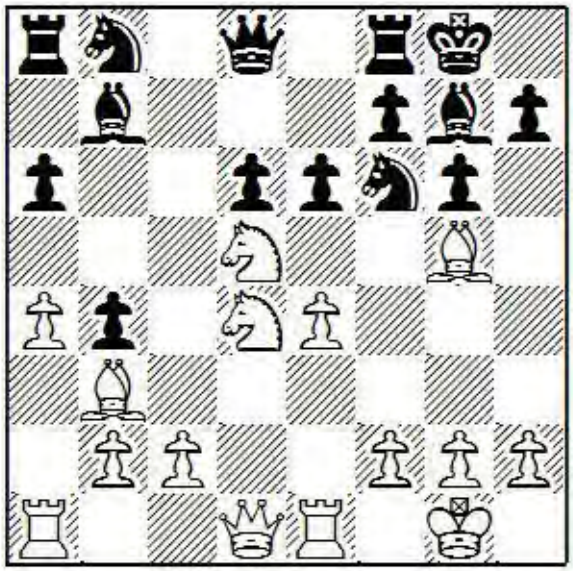
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Bc4 Bg7 7 0-0 0-0 8 Bb3



A natural retreat for the bishop (akin to 6 Bc4 line against the Najdorf). After 8 h3 Nc6, White has to be careful not to mix up move orders. For instance, 9 Be3 runs into 9 ... Nxe4! 10 Bxf7+?! (a better option is 10 Nxe4 d5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd3 dxe4 13 Bxe4 Qa5 14 c3 Rb8 15 Qc2 Bf5 16 b4 Bxe4 17 Qxe4 Qa3, although Black here, of course, is doing perfectly fine, R.Padmini-S.Vokarev, Bhubaneswar 2010) 10 ... Kxf7! 11 Nxe4 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 e5 13 Be3 d5 14 Ng3 Kg8 15 c3 Be6 16 Ne2 g5! and Black has the initiative and won convincingly in M.Adams-A.Shirov, Biel 1991.

8 ... Nc6

Black has to be a little careful here. The standard move 8 ... a6?! is an inaccuracy, which soon leaves Black struggling. After 9 Re1 b5 10 a4! b4 11 Nd5 Bb7 12 Bg5 e6, we reach a position which White is angling for in this line.

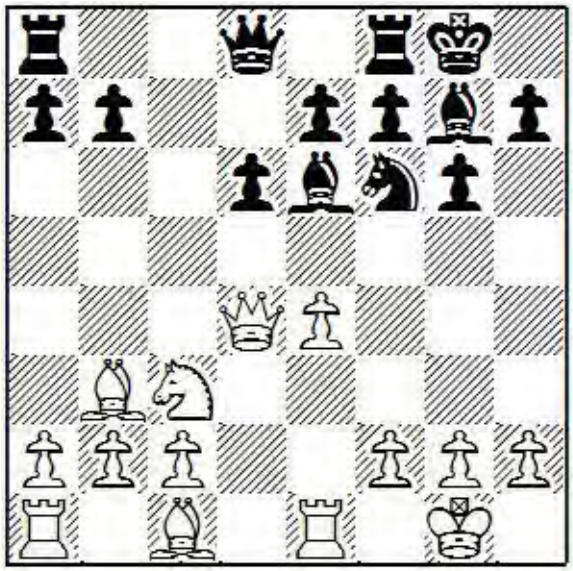


White exercised pragmatism over material with 13 Nxf6+ (Black gets some counterplay after 13 Nxb4 Qb6 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 c3 a5 according to Thomas Ernst) 13 ... Bxf6 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Qd2 a5 16 Nb5 Nc6 (16 ... Qxb2? 17 e5 wins for White as the queen is trapped) 17 Nxd6 Rad8 18 Rad1 e5 in S.B.Hansen-M.Petursson, Reykjavik 1995, where Black was lucky to eventually hold the draw. With 19 c3, White can emerge with a clear advantage.

9 Re1 Nxd4

A slightly different twist for Black is 9 ... Bd7 10 h3 Nxd4 11 Qxd4 Bc6 (threatening ... Nd5). 12 Qe3 (12 Qd1 b5 13 a3 Nd7 14 Nd5 (14 Be3 a6 15 Qd2 is also about equal) 14 ... Nc5 15 Bg5 Re8 16 Rb1 h6 17 Bh4 g5 18 Bg3 e6 19 Nb4 Bb7 and Black has already taken over the initiative, L.McShane-S.Tiviakov, Mallorca 2004) 12 ... Nd7 13 Bd2 Nc5 14 Rad1 Rc8 15 Bd5 e6 16 Bxc6 bxc6 with chances to both sides, A.Kveinys-S.B.Hansen, Germany 2001.

10 Qxd4 Be6!?



Apart from fighting for control of the d5-square, Black once again sets up ... Nd5 to mess up White's pawn structure with ... Nxc3, prompting White's queen retreat.

A viable alternative is 10 ... Nd7 11 Qd1 (it has been suggested that 11 Qd3 Nc5 12 Qg3 should be better for White, but the simple 12 ... a5 13 Bc4 Bd7 14 Bg5 Ne6 looks perfectly playable for Black) 11 ... Nc5 12 Bg5 Be6 13 Nd5 Bxd5 14 exd5 Re8 15 c3 Qd7 16 Bc2 b5 17 Qf3 a5 18 a3 and a draw was very prematurely agreed in A.Matikozian-M.Khachiyan, Yerevan 1999. The chances, however, are more or less equal, White's bishop pair notwithstanding.

11 Qd3

Now White intends to play Bg5 and Nd5 with a firm grip on Black's position.

Question: Why didn't White give Black a doubled pawn by exchanging on e6?

Answer: Another way to phrase the question is – why would White want to give Black an extra central pawn? A doubled pawn is only a weakness if it can get attacked, but in this case it would only strengthen Black's central control, in particular, prevent White from playing Nd5 (which is one of his big ideas, as well as open the f-file for Black. After 11 Bxe6 fxe6, if White tries to exploit the doubled pawns with 12 e5, Black can reply 12 ... Nd7 13 Qg4 Nxe5 14 Qxe6+ Kh8 15 Be3 Nc6 with equal chances.

11 ... Rc8

Already at this point, Black can consider 11 ... Nd7 aiming at either ... Nc5 or ... Ne5.

12 Bg5 Nd7!?

Apart from preparing ... Nc5/ ... Ne5 as mentioned, Black also pre-empts an uncomfortable Nd5 from White:

a) Alternatively, Black should avoid the passive 12 ... Re8?!, which handed White the initiative after 13 Bxe6! fxe6 14 Qh3 Kf7 15 e5 dxe5 16 Rxe5 Rc6 17 Rae1 and Black's position was dreadful, E.Repkova-I.Gaponenko, Leon 2001.

b) However, Black can also consider 12 ... Ng4 with a similar idea to the text move, for example 13 h3

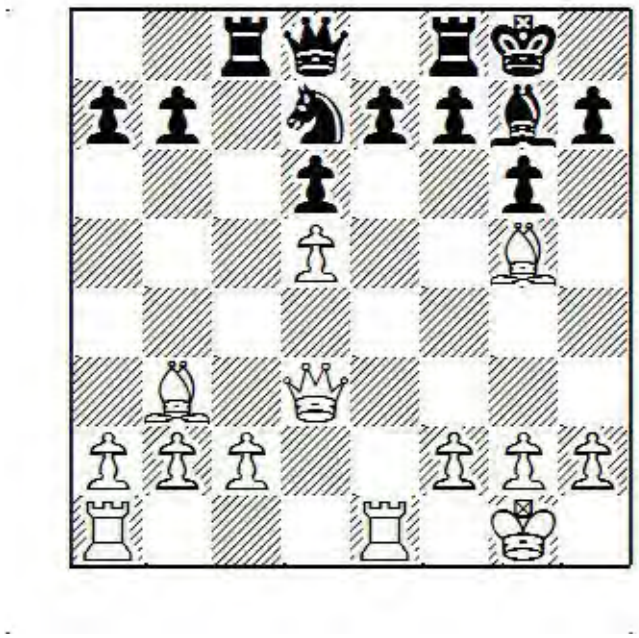
Ne5 14 Qd2 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Bxc4 16 Bh6 Bxh6 17 Qxh6 Qb6 and Black had equalised, J.Geske-C.Tiemann, correspondence 2011.

13 Nd5?!

White blindly follows his standard plan without taking Black's plan into consideration, admittedly it is easy to miss.

The better choice is 13 Qe3 Nc5 14 Bh6 Qb6 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Qd4+ Kg8 17 Rad1 Rfe8 with approximately equal chances.

13 ... Bxd5 14 exd5



Question: Why would Black accede to his e-pawn being pressed down? What does he have up his sleeve?

15 ... Bxb2!

Answer: Black has worked out that the e7-pawn can be traded for the b2-one (also, the f8-rook for the a1-chap), rationalising that the resulting pawn structure is favourable for Black. There is also the matter of the better minor piece left on the board.

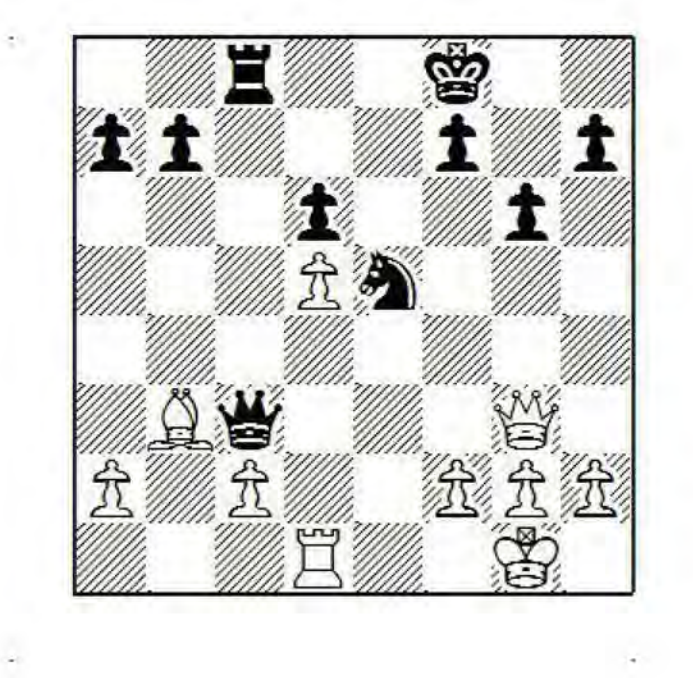
15 Bxe7 Qa5 16 Bxf8

On 16 Rab1 (or 16 Rad1), Black plays 16 ... Rfe8 pinning the Be7. The threat to the Re1 will force White to play all sorts of artificial moves to get the bishop home in one piece, such as 17 Re2 Be5 18 Bg5 Nc5 19 Qd1 Bc3 and Black has taken control of the game.

16 ... Bxa1 17 Rxa1

Unfortunately for White, he cannot keep his bishop pair because the Re1 is hanging. Instead, White is left with an ugly b3-bishop against a much stronger knight.

17 ... Kxf8 18 Qg3 Ne5 19 Rd1 Qc3



Question: Why does Black want to exchange queens?

Answer: Black is actually eager to get the queens exchanged because it will leave him with a clearly better ending with a rook and minor piece each. Black has a strong knight versus White's bad bishop and the latter is also saddled with an assortment of pawn structure weaknesses. Objectively speaking, Black is clearly better at this point.

20 Qf4 Kg7

Guarding the f6-square as there is no need to let White back into the game.

21 h3 b5

While Black's plan is easy to follow: push the a-pawn and watch White's queenside collapse, it is a lot harder to come up with any useful plan for White. So at this point, he needs to aim at not letting Black get his way too much.

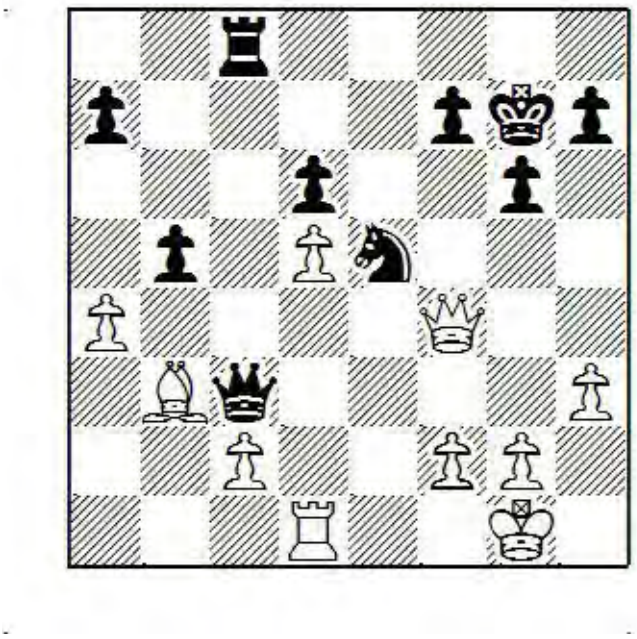
22 a4

This looks decidedly odd, but it has a couple of things working for it:

a) It prevents Black from playing ... a5-a4.

b) It potentially gives the bishop a bit more room to breathe.

c) Should Black play ... b5-b4, then White guards some very important pawns and Black will have to exchange the bishop to get to them.



Question: What should Black do about his b-pawn? Advance, defend or trade it off?

22 ... bxa4!?

Answer: My computer's preference is 22 ... b4, but the text move gives Black a passer on the a-file, one that can potentially give White nightmares when supported by the knight and rook. Both moves are good, in any case.

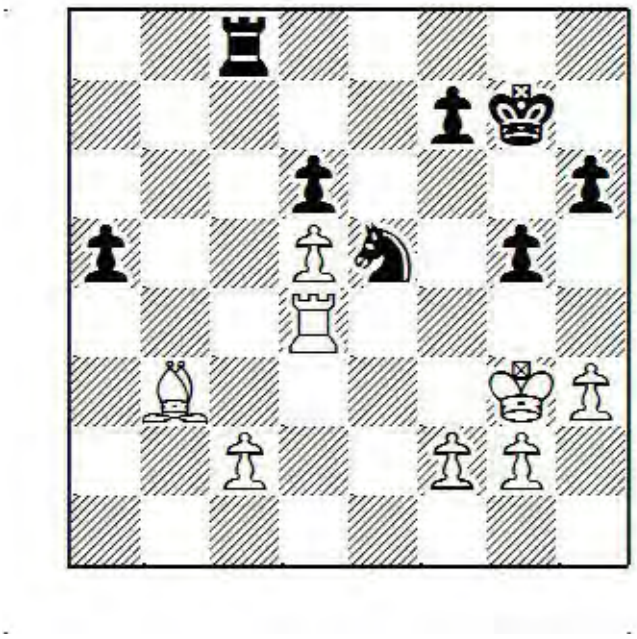
23 Qxa4 a5 24 Qf4 h6!

This is model play by Black, who continues his dark-squared strategy while allowing his king an extra square to hide from potential checks. The static advantages for Black, the strong knight versus bad bishop and the passed a-pawn, will not go away.

25 Kh2 Rb8!

The simple plan is ... Rb4 followed by ... a5-a4.

26 Qg3 Qxg3+ 27 Kxg3 Rc8 28 Rd4 g5!



Another pawn move that nails down Black's strategy on the dark squares. The remainder of the game is very instructive, illustrating how to win such an endgame with a good knight versus a bad bishop.

29 f3 f5 30 Kf2 Kf6 31 h4

White wants to eliminate as many pawns as possible in case there is a need to sacrifice the bishop for a pawn at some point.

31 ... Ng6?!

Here, 31 ... Nd7 makes more sense.

32 hxg5+ hxg5 33 g3?!

White weakens the f-pawn, a weakness he can surely do without.

33 ... Ne5 34 Ra4 Rc3 35 f4 Ng4+

Black could also consider 35 ... Nd7 to follow up with 36 Rxa5 Nc5, landing the knight on e4 to win White's g-pawn. Note that White's b3-bishop is hardly participating in the game.

36 Kg2 Ne3+ 37 Kg1

Also, 37 Kf2 loses to 37 ... Nxc2 38 fxg5+ Kxg5 39 Bxc2 Rxc2+ 40 Kf3 Rc5.

37 ... Nd1?!

This allows White a reprieve which is admittedly, hard to find as time control draws near. Stronger is to once again, get the knight back to the e4-square to hit the g3-pawn with 37 ... Kg6! (this also prepares a king advance via the h-file) and if 38 Rxa5 Ng4 39 Kg2 Nf6 with 40 ... Ne4 to come.

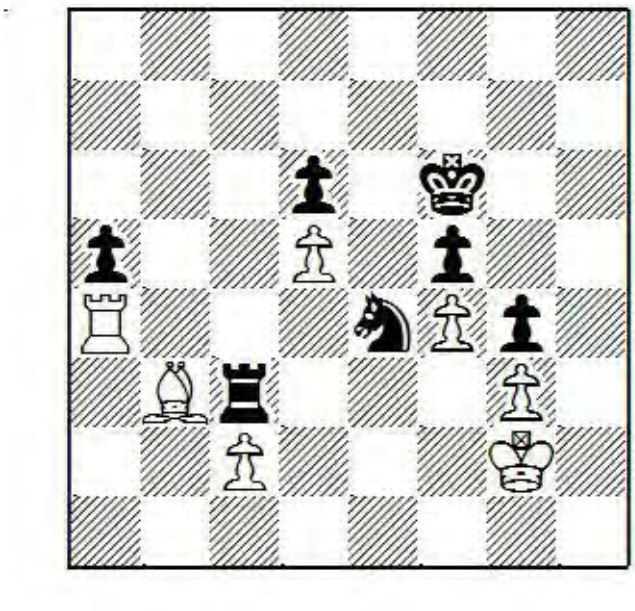
38 Kg2?

White logically defends the g3-pawn. However, a better defence is to harass the knight with 38 Ra1! (to prevent ... Nc3 as the knight cannot get to the important e4-square) 38 ... Ne3 (or 38 ... Nb2 39 fxg5 Kxg5 40 Rxa5) 39 Rxa5 when Black cannot do better than a draw.

38 ... Rc5

Now the idea behind ... Nd1 becomes apparent. Black wants the knight to head for the e4-square via ... Nc3 with devastating effect.

39 Kf3?! g4+ 40 Kg2 Nc3 41 Rd4 Ne4 42 Ra4 Rc3



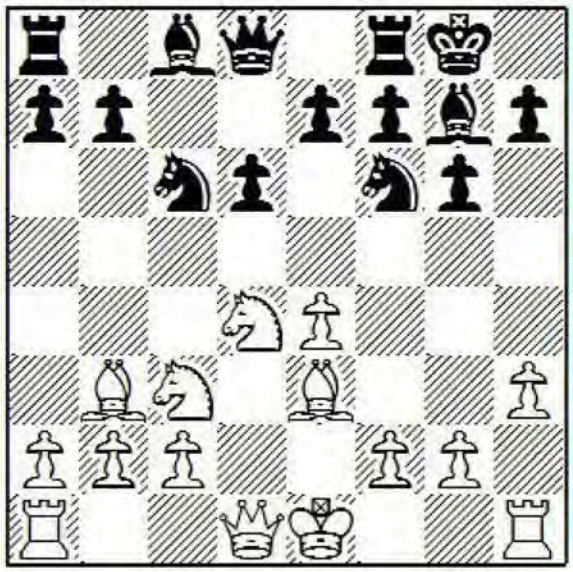
Great stuff! White's g- and f-pawns are destined to drop and with them of course, the game.

43 Rxa5 Rxg3+ 44 Kh2 Rf3 45 Ra6 Rxf4 0-1

White decided he had enough.

Game 17
V.Anand-G.Kasparov
Linares 2003

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 h3



Via an Accelerated Dragon move order, we have ended up in the Bc4 Dragon. This particular line is not considered particularly dangerous for Black.

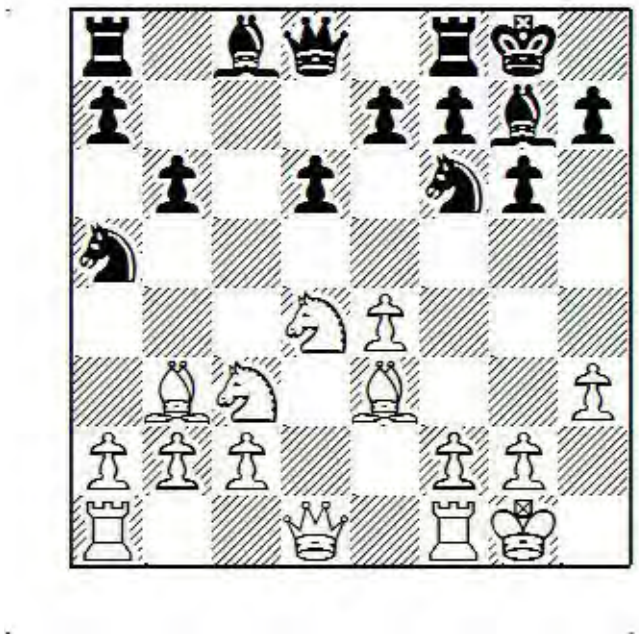
Question: I have noticed that Black sometimes uses these transpositions from the Accelerated Dragon, why is that?

Answer: In this case, I think it is more of a practical choice. If White had played 3 d4, I doubt Kasparov would have played the Accelerated Dragon, and instead head for the Sveshnikov Sicilian with 3 ... cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5. However, in regards to the Accelerated Dragon, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using that move order. The main advantage is that you avoid the Yugoslav Attack, which will save you from learning a lot of theory, but I think you are also missing out on a lot of fun. However, the main disadvantage is that Black in the Accelerated Dragon allows the Maroczy Bind with 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 c4, which certainly is not to everybody's liking.

9 ... Na5!?

Black takes the game out of the most normal lines. The main line is 9 ... Bd7, and after 10 0-0, one of the safer options for Black is 10 ... Nxd4!? 11 Bxd4 Bc6 12 Re1 e5 13 Be3 Nxe4 14 Nxe4 Bxe4 15 Qd2 Bc6 16 Rad1 e4 17 Bd4 Be5 and a draw was agreed in E.Sutovsky-R.Ponomariov, Porto Carras 2011. The game could have continued with 18 Bxe5 dxe5 19 Bd5 Bxd5 20 Qxd5 Qxd5 21 Rxd5 Rac8 22 c3 Rcd8 23 Rxe5 f5 24 f3 exf3 25 gxf3 Rd2 26 R1e2 with no more than equality for White.

10 0-0 b6!?



Question: This looks different. What is the idea of this set-up?

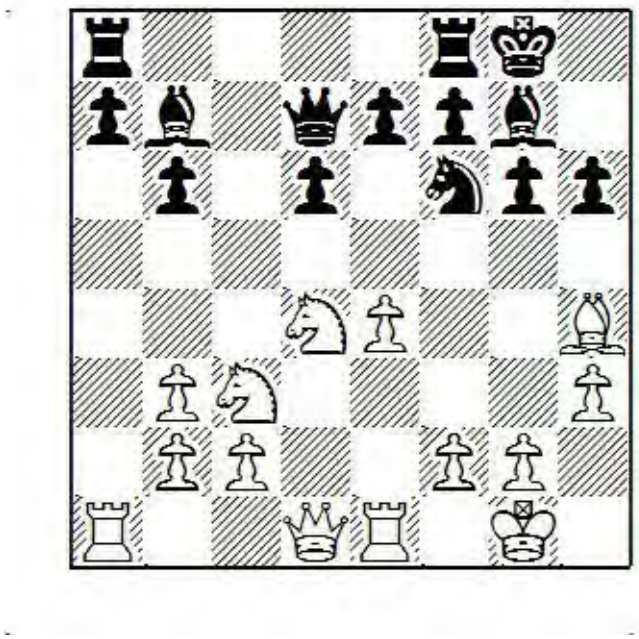
Answer: By preparing to put the bishop on b7, Black keeps an eye out against White's standard plan of playing Nd5 with a positional clamp on Black's position. If needed, he can also exchange the light-squared bishop on b3.

An entirely different plan was used in D.Frolyanov-B.Savchenko, St Petersburg 2009: 10 ... Bd7 11 Qd2 Rc8 12 Bh6 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Rfe1 Qb6 16 Nb3 a5 and Black had equalised.

11 Re1

With the b7-bishop bearing down at the e4-pawn, White needs to keep it covered, preferably without weakening the kingside with f2-f3. The text intends to follow up with Bg5 and if possible Nd5 with pressure against the black centre. The main alternative is 11 Qd3 Bb7 12 Bg5 Nxb3 13 axb3 a6 14 Rfe1 h6 15 Bd2 b5 16 f4 e6 17 Kh2 Rc8 18 Re2 Qc7 and Black has already grabbed the initiative, J.Polgar-V.Topalov, Novgorod 1996.

11 ... Bb7 12 Bg5 Nxb3 13 axb3 h6 14 Bh4 Qd7!?



The flexible 14 ... a6 was Black's go-to move before Kasparov introduced the text. 15 Nd5 Re8 (15 ... Nxd5 16 exd5 g5? runs into 17 Nf5! and 17 ... Re8? 18 Qh5! only makes it worse whereas 15 ... e6 16

Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 c4 leaves White with a small comfortable advantage) 16 c4 e6 17 Nxf6+ Bxf6 18 Bxf6 Qxf6 19 Qd2 d5 20 e5 Qg5 21 Qxg5 hxg5 22 Nc2 Rec8 23 Ne3 a5 and Black has absolutely no problems, Yu Yangyi-Li Shilong, Xinghua 2013.

Question: Why did Kasparov play this queen shift? What does it achieve?

Answer: The queen move nixes White's typical centralising plan in the bud by contesting the f5-square. Now White cannot play 15 Nd5 because after 15 ... Nxd5 16 exd5 g5, he no longer has the f5-square available for the knight.

15 Qd2 Nh5!?

In an earlier game, Black tried 15 ... Rfe8 and achieved a pretty good position as well before going astray after 16 Rad1 Nh5 17 Nde2 b5 18 Ng3 Nxg3 19 Bxg3 a5 20 e5 Qc6 21 f3 in N.Aleksic-B.Abramovic, Barcelona 1991 and now 21 ... dxe5 22 Bxe5 Rad8 would have given Black the initiative.

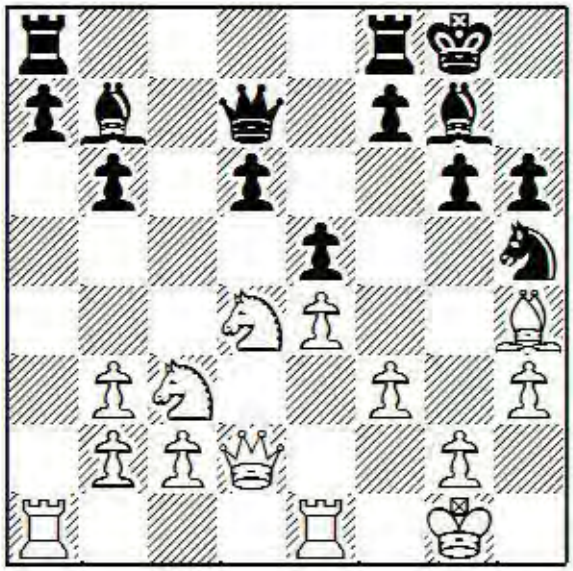
16 f3

Question: This seemingly weakens the dark squares. Is it really necessary to play this?

Answer: I think so. It attempts to muzzle the b7-bishop and offers his own dark-squared bishop a retreat path in the face of the ... g6-g5 threat.

Alternatively, 16 Nde2?! would have completely handed the car keys over to Black, for instance after 16 ... g5 17 Bg3 f5! 18 exf5 Qxf5 and Black is in control.

16 ... e5!?



A very aggressive move by the former World Champion. With this and the next two moves, Black completely changes the nature of the game, seizing the initiative and starting to attack on the kingside.

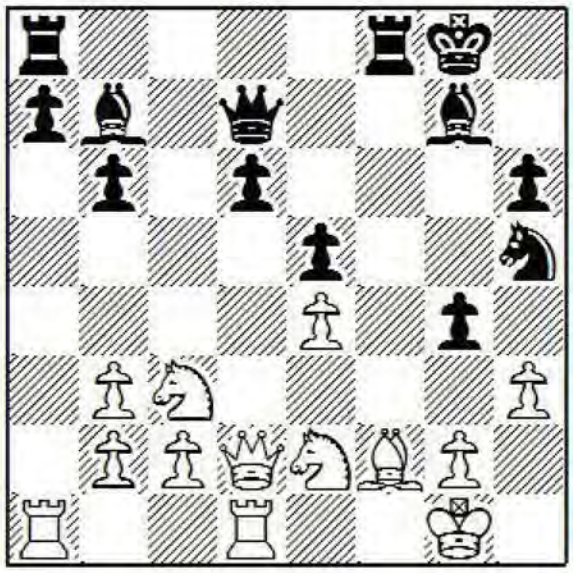
17 Nde2

For obvious reasons, White would have to be careful to send the knight to b5 where it will be completely offside after 17 Ndb5 d5 18 exd5 a6 19 Na3 b5. But even so, after 20 b4 Qd6 21 Ne4 Qxd5 22 Qxd5 Bxd5 23 Nc5, chances are about even.

17 ... f5 18 Red1!?

Anand keeps a cool head, despite having every reason to start worrying. With the text move, he applies pressure on the backward d6-pawn. This could also have been done with the other rook, but that would have freed Black's a8-rook from its defensive duties. On the other hand, 18 exf5 Rxf5 opens up the game for Black's pieces.

18 ... fxe4 19 fxe4 g5 20 Bf2 g4



21 h4!

The greedy 21 Qxd6?! is asking for trouble, even if he may be able to find his way out of danger. After 21 ... Qf7 22 Be3 (or 22 Bh4 gxh3 23 Rf1 Nf4 24 Nxf4 exf4 25 Bg3 Qh5 26 Rxf4 Rxf4 27 Qxf4 hxg2 28 Kxg2 Rf8 with Black's activity and bishop pair providing excellent compensation for the pawn) 22 ... gxh3 23 Qd7 hxg2 24 Qxf7+ Rxf7 25 Kxg2 Nf6 26 Ng3 Rc8, Black's pieces are nicely organised and active.

21 ... Nf4 22 Qxd6?!

White decides to cash in his chips and pick up the pawn, even though he should be able to calculate his way far enough to determine that it actually does nothing towards winning the game. Therefore, the alternative 22 Ng3!? Rf6 23 Be3!? Qf7 24 b4 should be considered. While Black has the bishop pair and a nice-looking f4-knight, White has the better chances thanks to his pressure against the d- and a-pawns and his access to f5-square.

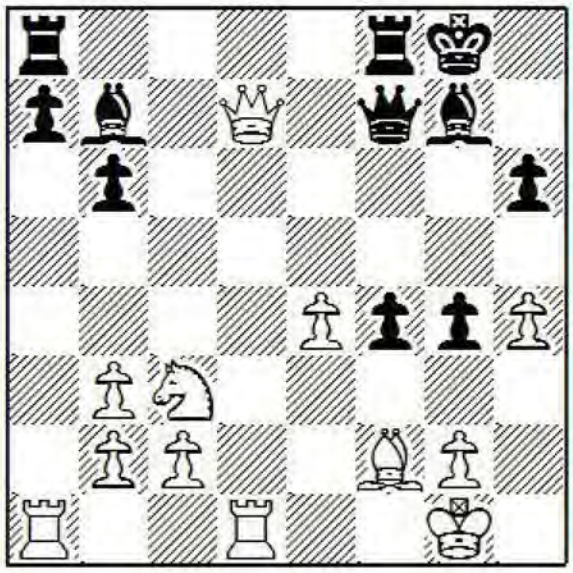
22 ... Qf7

If Black is still playing for a win, then he should consider 22 ... Nxe2+!? 23 Nxe2 Qf7, but after 24 Rf1 Bxe4 25 Be3 Qg6 26 Rxf8+ Rxf8 27 Qxg6 Bxg6 28 Rxa7 Bxc2 29 Rb7. there are very few winning chances left for Black.

23 Nxf4!

Anand straightens out Black's pawns and opens up for the g7-bishop. So why would he do that? The short answer, he had calculated this through to the final position already at this point.

23 ... exf4 24 Qd7



24 ... Qxd7 25 Rxd7 Rf7!

Black obviously does not want to let White roam freely on the seventh rank.

26 Rd6

There is no need for White to enter 26 Rad1 Bxc3 27 bxc3 Bxe4. While White should not lose this endgame, he definitely does not have any chances to win either.

26 ... Kh7 27 Rad1 Re8

After 27 ... Bxc3 28 bxc3 Bxe4 29 Re1 Re8 30 h5!, the game is likewise drifting towards the draw.

28 Rd7 Ree7 29 Rxe7 Rxe7 30 Bd4 Rd7 31 Nd5!

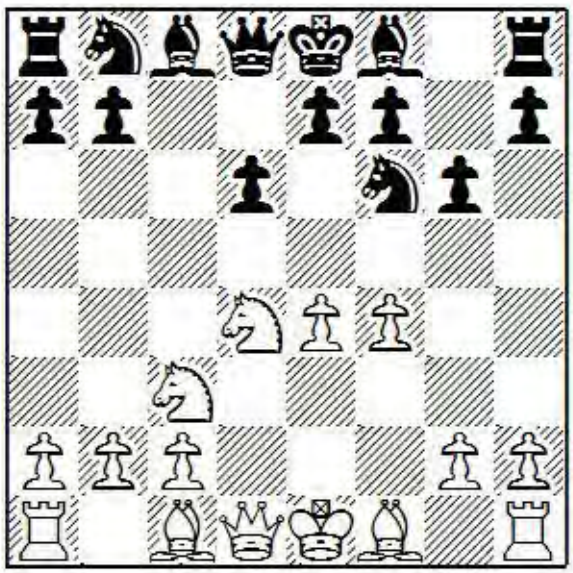
White obviously will want no part of 31 Bxg7? Rxd1+ 32 Nxd1 Kxg7 33 Nc3 Kf6, and Black has decent winning chances in the endgame. After the text move, however, we are steering straight towards a draw.

31 ... Bxd5 32 Bxg7 Bc6 ½-½

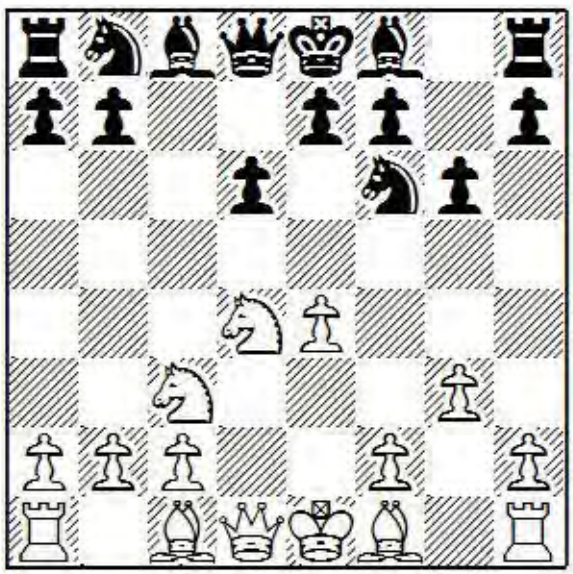
With a drawn, opposite-coloured bishop ending emerging, the players decided to call it a day.

Chapter Four
Levenfish, 6 g3 and Other Minor Lines

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 f4



6 g3



The lines we are covering in this chapter could not have anything less to do with each other in terms of characteristics, but they are not quite large enough to get their own chapters. While there are other minor moves that the ones I have chosen to cover, these are some of the more interesting ones.

The two key lines are:

a) The Levenfish, 6 f4, which has never really been popular at the top level, but it is seen with some regularity and because it differs so much from any other line in the Dragon, it is important to have some

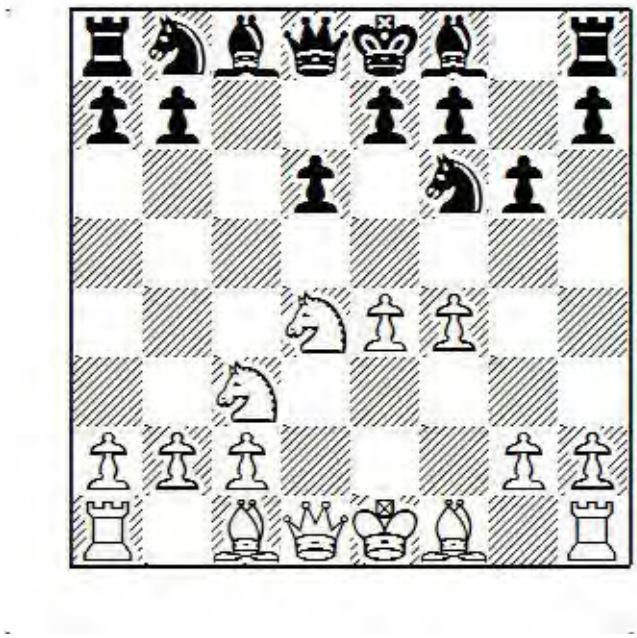
understanding of what is going on. In Game 18, we examine the main line: 6 ... Nc6 7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 e5, whereas in Game 19, White stays clear of this by playing 7 Nf3, maintaining the tension in the centre.

b) The Fianchetto line, 6 g3, is a positional choice, trying to restrain Black from playing ... d6-d5, and then put a clamp on the entire black position by putting a knight on d5. Needless to say, Black does not need to be that accommodating. In game 20, Black meets it with 6 ... Nc6, and after 7 Bg2 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Bg7, White tries the unusual 9 a4. Game 21 explores the consequences of the main line which is 9 0-0 0-0, and here White chooses the restraining 10 Qb4. The last of our games with 6 g3, Game 22, sees White test a set-up with Nde2 via 6 ... Bg7 (6 ... Nc6 7 Nde2 is another possible move order) 7 Bg2 0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Nde2.

Finally, we round the chapter off with an unusual line in Game 23 where White combines 6 Bg5 with 7 Bb5. This line is not entirely harmless if Black is not alert. However, in our main game Black shows how to handle this line with confidence.

Game 18
E.Perelshteyn-G.Shahade
New York 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 f4



6 ... Nc6!?

Let's have a look at the alternatives:

a) When I first started playing the Dragon, I was told that 6 ... Bg7 was a mistake due to 7 e5, but it turns out that it is in fact quite playable:

a1) 7 ... dxe5?! is the first step in the wrong direction and after 8 fxe5 Ng4? is the leap into the abyss (8 ... Nfd7 is safer; for instance 9 e6 Ne5 10 exf7+ Kxf7 11 Be2 Nbc6 12 0-0+ Bf6 13 Nxc6 bxc6 is slightly better for White, but still playable) 9 Bb5+ and while everything looks pretty disgusting, Black's next move ends the game immediately: 9 ... Kf8?? (Black must play 9 ... Nc6 as 9 ... Bd7? loses a piece to 10 Qxg4 though after 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Bxc6+ Bd7 12 Bxa8 Qxa8, Black survives long enough to make it a game, but Black definitely will want to do something different earlier) 10 Ne6+ and it is basically over, A.Samsonkin-B.Murali Krishnan, Chennai 2004.

a2) 7 ... Nh5 8 Bb5+ Bd7 9 e6 fxe6 10 Nxe6 Bxc3+ reaching a very messy position that may not be bad for Black at all and indeed the second player went on to win it: 11 bxc3 Qc8 12 Bxd7+ Kxd7!? (12 ... Nxd7 13 0-0 Nc5 14 f5 Nf6 15 Nd4 Nce4 16 Bh6 Rg8 is messy, complicated and perfectly playable for both sides, I.Sevo-J.Palkovi, Paks 1998) 13 Ng5 Qxc3+ 14 Bd2 Qc4 15 Rb1 b6 16 Rb4 Qd5 leaves Black a pawn up, but, naturally White has a great deal of compensation thanks to the lead in development

and Black's king is stuck in the centre, M.Al Modiahki-A.Motylev, Dubai 2005.

b) 6 ... a6 7 Bd3 Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0 transposes to a line in the Najdorf Sicilian, which is considered perfectly fine for Black, but that is considerably outside our topic.

c) 6 ... Nbd7 is also fully playable and has been recommended from time to time. This is exact move order isn't seen too often at master level and it can also lead to transpositions from the earlier-mentioned 6 ... a6.

7 Nxc6

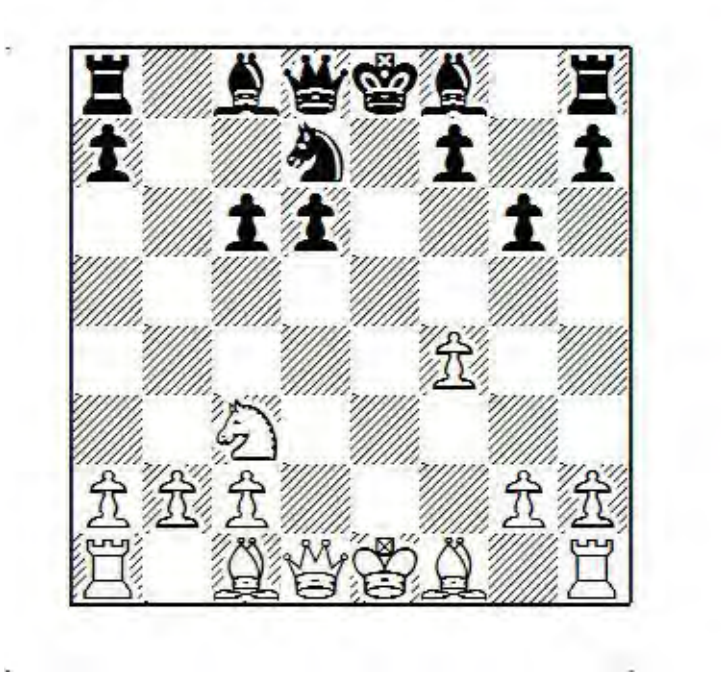
This is one of White's key ideas in this variation. After the exchange, White follows up with e4-e5, intending to disrupt Black's game plan.

7 Nf3 will be covered in our next main game, whereas 7 Bb5 is also seen with some frequency, but again Black is fine after 7 ... Bd7 8 Bxc6 bxc6 9 e5 Nd5 10 Nxd5 cxd5 11 0-0 e6 12 Qe2 Bg7 13 c3 0-0 and Black has every reason to be satisfied, P.Nikac-V.Inkiov, Nis 1994.

7 ... bxc6 8 e5 Nd7

Although it should be obvious that Black should stay away from 8 ... dxe5, it has been played a surprising amount of times, including by several rather strong players. It doesn't lose but leads to a somewhat inferior endgame after 9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 fxe5 Nd7 (10 ... Ng4 11 Bf4 Bg7 12 0-0-0+ Bd7 13 Re1 is even better for White) 11 Bf4 Bg7 12 0-0-0 Ke8 13 Re1 Nc5, T.Apostu-D.Shengelia, Aschach 2004 and now 14 Be3 Ne6 15 Bf2 is a tad better for White.

9 exd6 exd6



Question: It looks like Black, with his loose pawns and seemingly holes everywhere, has far more weaknesses than White. Is that a correct observation?

Answer: In some ways you are absolutely right, but just as not everything is Black or White, not all weaknesses are equally severe. The white king faces some issues; castling queenside seems risky in the face of the half-open b-file combined with a bishop on g7 looming. Castling kingside doesn't seem that cosy either with the exposed g1-a7 diagonal to take into account as well. That said, Black has to be a little careful, because weaknesses are weaknesses and unless handled carefully, they may become major problems later on.

10 Be3

This is the logical and most common-sense continuation, but that of course has never stopped people from trying other moves. For example, 10 Qd4 Nf6 11 Be3 Be7 12 0-0-0 (12 Be2 0-0 13 Bf3 d5 was played in G.Kasparov-Y.Balashov, Moscow 1981, where Black was doing fine at this point) 12 ... 0-0 13 h3 d5 and Black is doing great, N.Illijin-M.Cebalo, Baden 1999.

10 ... Be7

Question: Wait a minute, Black leaves the g7 hole unprotected and develops the bishop to e7. What is Black doing?

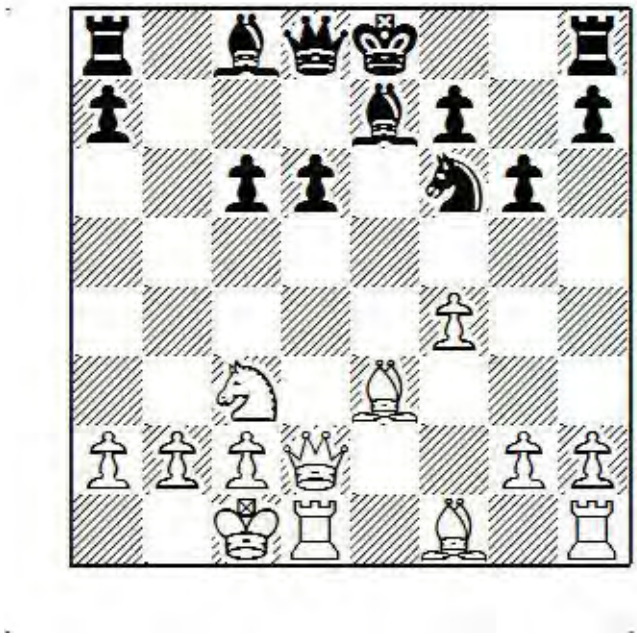
Answer: It of course looks odd to play ... g7-g6 and then develop the bishop to e7, but in this case, it makes a lot of sense. If the bishop heads to g7, then the d6-pawn will be soft and Black will likely have to play ... d6-d5, weakening the dark squares considerably.

Black has also tried a more traditional set-up with 10 ... Nf6 11 Qd2 (11 Bd3 Bg7 12 h3 Rb8 13 Rb1 Qe7 14 Qf3 was B.Heberla-D.Svetushkin, Kusadasi 2006 and now 14 ... 0-0 15 0-0 Re8 16 Rfe1 Qd7 would have offered even chances) 11 ... Bg7 12 0-0-0 d5 13 Bc5 Be6 14 Qd4 Qa5 15 Bb4 Qc7 16 g3 Rb8 17 Ba3 Rg8 and despite the black king being stuck in the centre on an open file, Black is doing rather well and went on to win an interesting game. Objectively speaking, chances are probably about even here.

11 Qd2 Nf6

There really isn't a good reason to not just castle right away, and this is in fact also what is recommended by *ECO*. After 11 ... 0-0 12 0-0-0 Nb6 (12 ... d5!? 13 g4 Qa5!? 14 f5 Rb8 15 Bd4 Re8 looks promising for Black) 13 Be2 d5 14 h4 h5 15 g4?! Bxg4 16 Bxg4 Nc4 17 Qd3 Qb8 18 b3 as played in B.Larsen-A.Lein, Lone Pine 1979, Black would be doing rather well after 18 ... Nxe3 19 Qxe3 Re8! 20 Qf3 hxg4 21 Qxg4 Qb4.

12 0-0-0



Question: I thought you said that White had to be careful with this move in view of the half open b-file?

Answer: Yes, I did. Perelshteyn is a specialist on the Levenfish and is naturally well-versed in what should and should not be done. He had in fact played this line prior to this, so I'm not going argue too much against it, but I still think it looks dangerous. However, he might have rationalised that with the black bishop on e7, the consequences are quite limited.

A different game plan was used by White in V.Rogovski-A.Tukhaev, Alushta 2006, with 12 Be2 0-0 13 0-0 Ng4 14 Bxg4 Bxg4 15 Ne4 Re8 16 Ng3 Bh4 17 f5 Bxg3 18 fxg6 Bxh2+ 19 Kxh2 Qh4+ 20 Kg1 hxg6 and White has compensation for the pawn, thanks to the weak dark squares in Black's camp.

12 ... 0-0 13 h3

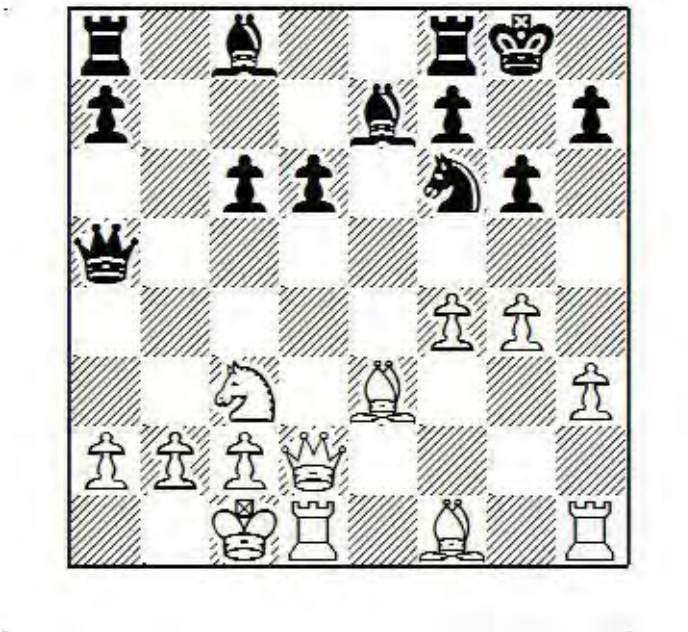
It is useful to take away the g4-square from Black's pieces but White's aggression on the kingside amounts to little.

13 ... Qa5

Black has also tried 13 ... d5 14 g4 Qa5 15 Qd4 Re8 16 Bg2 Nd7 17 Qa4 (White can also consider 17 Nxd5!? cxd5 18 Qxd5 Qxd5 19 Bxd5 Rb8 20 Bxa7 Rb4 21 Bc6 with an interesting struggle) 17 ... Qxa4 18 Nxa4 Bd6 19 Bd2 Nb6 20 Nxb6 axb6 21 Kb1 b5 22 Rde1 Bd7 23 Rxe8+ Rxe8 and only Black can be

better, E.Perelshteyn-J.Shahade, San Francisco 1999.

14 g4



14 ... Be6

Old theory books may mention 14 ... Rb8 15 b3 Nd7 16 Kb1 d5 17 Ne2 Qxd2 18 Rxd2 Nc5 19 Ng3 a5 as equal but it should be easier to play Black here, W.Heidenfeld-H.Kramer, Beverwijk 1953.

15 Qe1

Question: What's with the queen shift?

Answer: White sets up the standard Nc3-d5 trick so that Black cannot capture on d2 with a check. This is a motif we will come across several times throughout this book.

Other tries are:

a) Rogozenco suggests 15 Bg2!? which may well be White's best move. It awaits further tests.

b) 15 Kb1? illustrates what White should avoid as Black can unleash 15 ... Ne4! 16 Qd4 Nxc3+ 17 Qxc3 Qxa2+ 18 Kc1 as in A.Hayrapetian-G.Bagaturov, Tbilisi 2007, and now simply 18 ... d5 19 Bd4 Rfb8 is deadly as it threatens ... Bb4 followed by ... Qa1 mate.

15 ... Rfe8

It is of course still possible to play 16 Nd5, but this runs into 16 ... Qxa2 which dramatically takes the joy out of playing Nd5.

16 Bg2 Qa6

Black has a full-good alternative in 16 ... Rab8, for instance 17 Bxc6 Qb4 18 Bxe8 Qxb2+ 19 Kd2 Ne4+ 20 Nxe4 Qb4+ 21 Nc3 (21 Kc1 leads to a draw by repetition: 21 ... Qb1+ 22 Kd2 Qb4+) 21 ... Bf6 22 Bxf7+ Bxf7 23 Ke2 Bxc3, and Black has ample compensation for exchange thanks the loose king.

17 Kb1 Bc4 18 Qg3

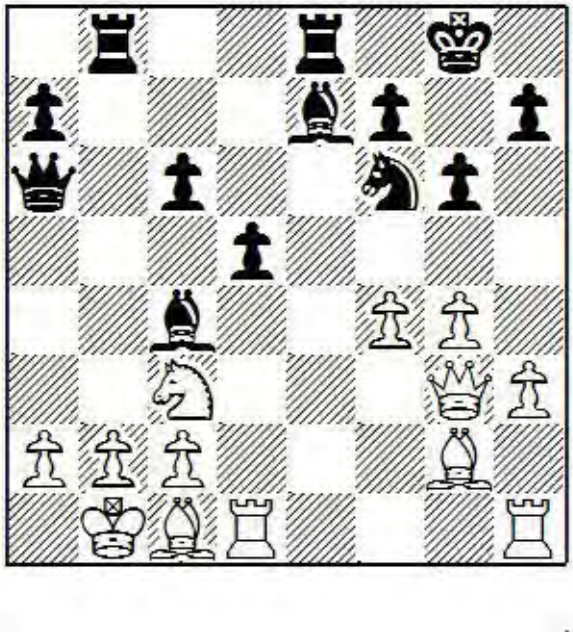
If you annotate this game with the final result in mind, you could say that White is letting the devil in through the back door, but that would be over-dramatizing the situation. Nevertheless, White could consider the solid 18 b3 Qb7 (18 ... d5 19 Qg3 Nd7 20 f5 Bf6 21 Ne4 Bh8 22 Rhe1 is also possible and a tiny bit better for White) 19 Bd4 a5 20 Ka1 Bd5 21 Nxd5 Nxd5 22 Bxd5 cxd5 23 Qd2 a4 24 b4 and White has avoided getting mated and can now start thinking about consolidating, safe-guarding the situation on the queenside and then take a look at the weak d5-pawn.

18 ... d5 19 Bc1

The aggressive-looking 19 f5 is swiftly punished by 19 ... Bb4 and White cannot adequately defend

against ... Bxc3 followed by ... Qxa2+.

19 ... Rab8



While putting a rook on the b-file staring down towards the white king on b1 makes good sense, the stronger move is actually 19 ... Bb4. For instance, 20 b3 Rad8 21 Bb2 d4 22 Na4 c5 23 a3 d3 has Black's initiative developing more rapidly than anything White can dream about on the kingside.

20 Ka1?

White is taking things a little too casually with all of Black's pieces lining up against his king. Thus, it wouldn't hurt to play a solid move here. Generally, one should not recommend moving pawns in front of the king when the opponent is attacking head-on. However, there are exceptions, especially if such a move helps to strengthen the pawn shield. For instance, 20 b3!? Ba3 21 Bb2 Bxb2 22 Kxb2 Qb6 23 Rhe1 gives White a tiny positional edge, thanks to his better pawn structure.

20 ... d4!?

It is hard to resist the temptation of starting an attack where you gain tempi along the way while you are putting your pieces on more active squares. However, the best move here is 20 ... c5! when 21 b3 d4 22 Na4 d3 (22 ... Nd5 23 Bxd5 Bxd5 also looks promising) 23 Rxd3 Bxd3 24 Qxd3 c4 25 Qxc4 Qxc4 26 bxc4 Ne4 27 Bb2 Bf6 28 Bxf6 Nxf6 and Black is much better here even if White has a couple of pawns for the exchange.

21 Rxd4 Bc5

Rogozenco's 21 ... Nd5!?, intending ... Bf6 and ... Nb4, looks promising for Black.

22 Rdd1 Re2

Very nice. The rook of course cannot be touched because of the mate on a2.

23 f5

It is not possible to play 23 a3 as Black simply captures it with 23 ... Bxa3! 24 bxa3 Rxc2 25 Rd2 Rxc1+ 26 Rxc1 Qxa3+ and with both the c1-rook and g3-queen unguarded, it is over for White.

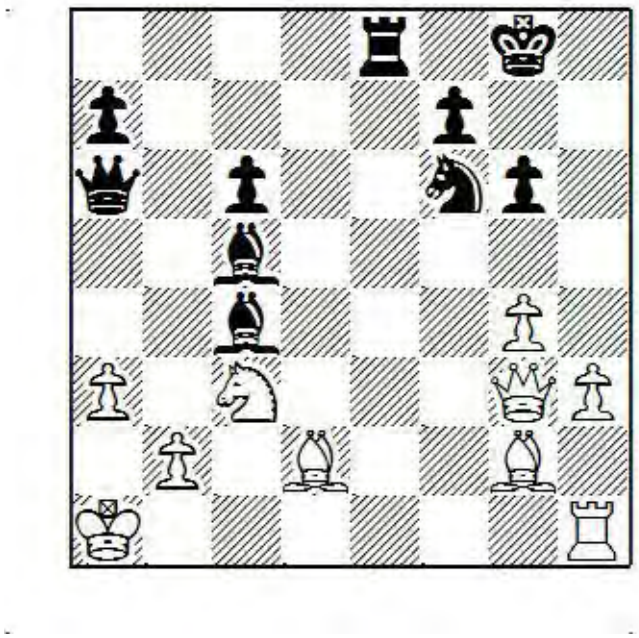
23 ... Rbe8 24 fxg6?!

Necessary now is 24 a3 and after 24 ... Rxc2 25 Kb1 Rf2 26 h4 Qb7 27 Na4 Ree2, even though the position seems frightening to play for White, both 28 Qc3 and the fearless 28 Bf1 work out well.

24 ... hxg6 25 a3 Rxc2 26 Rd2??

A dreadful blunder. A better option to hang on is 26 Kb1 Rf2 after which Black has the initiative and better chances.

26 ... Rxd2 27 Bxd2



Exercise: What is Black's best move? Try to calculate the continuation to the end.

Answer: **27 ... Bxa3!!**

Black crashes through, thanks to White's unguarded g3-queen which denies him the option of covering the a2-square.

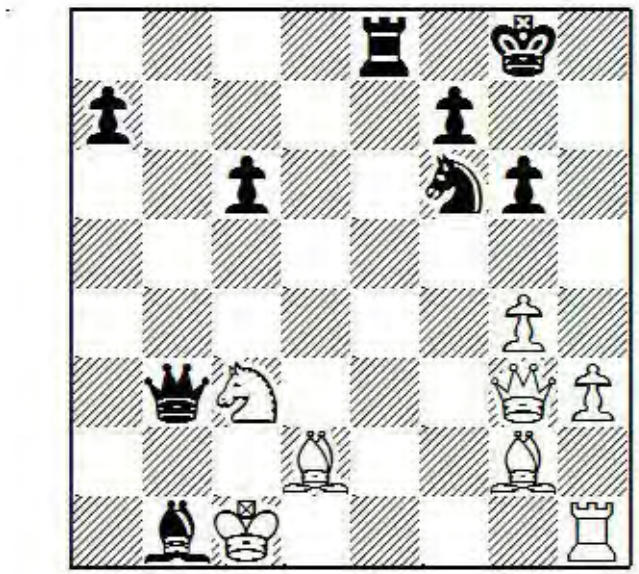
28 bxa3?

This rushes the end of the game. White could have tried to hold on with 28 Na4, opening the path for the queen to assist in the defence. But even then, it is too little and too late as after 28 ... Bc5 29 b3 Bd4+ 30 Kb1 Qb5 31 Re1 Bd3+ 32 Ka2 Rb8, it is game over for White.

28 ... Qxa3+ 29 Kb1 Ba2+

Black has undoubtedly calculated this line to its conclusion but 29 ... Rd8 is simpler and there is no sufficient way for White to meet the very direct threat of 30 ... Bd3+.

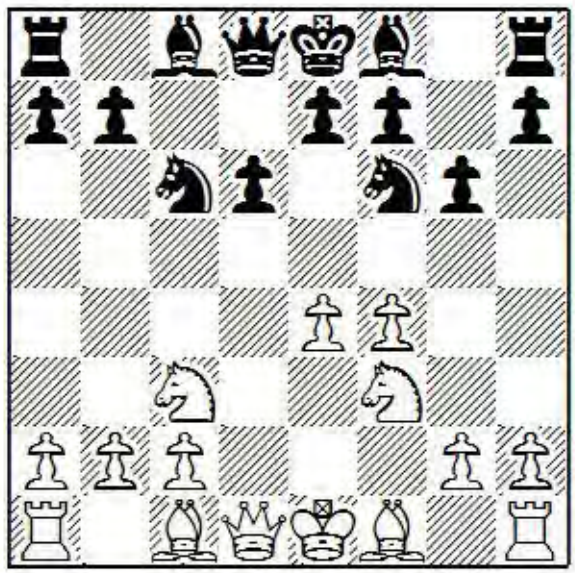
30 Kc2 Qb3+ 31 Kc1 Bb1 0-1



Not the only move to win, but the most elegant one. White can only prevent mate at the loss of massive amounts of material. Needless to say, White gave up the ghost.

Game 19
J.Hector-N.Grandelius
Swedish Championships, Falun 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 f4 Nc6 7 Nf3



In the previous game, we discussed 7 Nxc6 bxc6 8 e5. In the present game, White opts for set-up that is similar to one that can be used against the Najdorf as well with 5 ... a6 6 f4 g6 (or 6 ... e5 7 Nf3) 7 Nf3 followed by 8 Bd3. It has decent pedigree and is not a bad alternative to entering the main line Levenfish. The Swedish Grandmaster behind the white pieces in this game is the leading practitioner of this line.

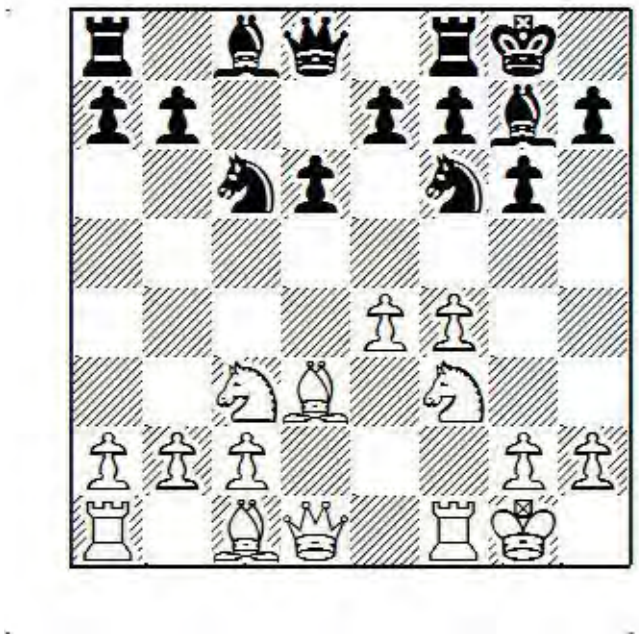
7 ... Bg7

Black has also tried the pin 7 ... Bg4 8 h3 (immediately challenging the bishop though 8 Be3 Bg7 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 Nd7 is an alternative that is also perfectly fine for Black) 8 ... Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Bg7 10 Bd3 Qb6!? (Black prevents White from castling, but the simple 10 ... 0-0 11 Bd2 Nd7 12 0-0-0 Nc5 is fine for Black) 11 Nd1 Nd7 (11 ... Nb4!? kills White's bishop pair and leads to approximately even chances after 12 Be3 Nxd3+ 13 cxd3 Qb5) 12 c3 Nc5 13 Bc2 a5 14 Be3 a4 15 0-0 Qb5 16 Rb1 0-0 and the position is about even, J.Hector-V.Korchnoi, Copenhagen 2005.

8 Bd3 0-0

Black can prevent White from castling with 8 ... Qb6, and then after 9 Qe2 (9 h3 is met by 9 ... e5! 10 fxe5 dxe5 11 Qe2 0-0 12 Qf2 Nb4 13 Qxb6 axb6 14 0-0 Be6 15 Be3 Nxd3 16 cxd3 Rfd8, and the chances are about level) 9 ... 0-0 (9 ... Bg4 10 Qf2 Qxf2+ 11 Kxf2 0-0 12 Nd2!? (12 Be3 Rfe8 was agreed drawn in Polgar-Gulko, Kona 1998) 12 ... Bd7 (12 ... Be6 13 a3 d5 is of course fine for Black) 13 h3 Nb4 14 Nf3 Rfc8 15 Be3 b5 (15 ... Bc6 16 a3 Nxd3+ 17 cxd3 Nd7 is better and comfortable for Black) 16 a3 Nxd3+ 17 cxd3 a5 is about equal but far from a draw as Black soon found out in this game, J.Hector-M.Pein, London 1999.) 10 Nd1 e5! 11 fxe5 was M.Mrdja-S.Rezan, Sibenik 2009, and now Ward's 11 ... Nxe5! is most likely best with 12 Nxe5 dxe5 13 Be3 Qc6 14 Nc3 Be6 leading to a pleasant game for Black.

9 0-0



Question: How does White intend continue his attack?

Answer: White's idea is to play Qe1-h4, f4-f5, Bh6, Ng5 and Rf1-f3-h3. Of course, all of these take time and Black is allowed to move every other time.

Question: What is the most active (and yet sound) Black continuation now?

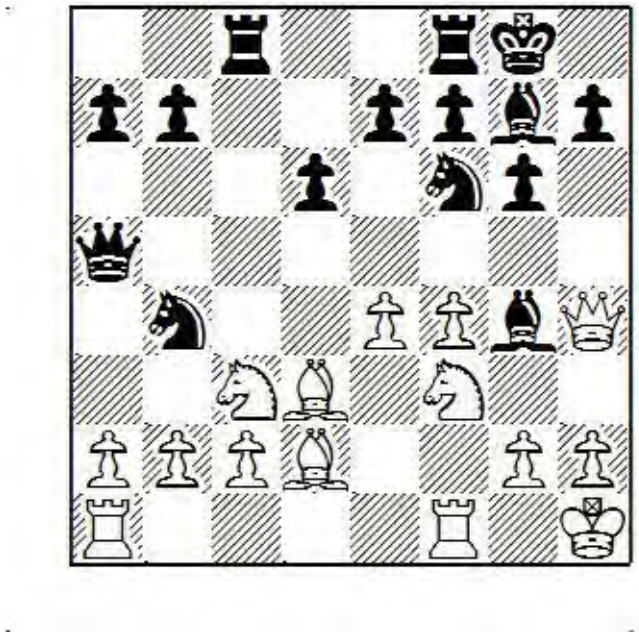
Answer: **9 ... b5!?**

The g1-a7 exposed diagonal allows Black to play this counterattacking move immediately. Well this is not the only move, but if this is the first time White is playing this line, this move could come as a surprise, especially since it looks like this pawn can be picked up by White free of charge.

However, before getting to that, let's take a quick look at the main alternatives:

a) 9 ... Bg4 10 Qe1 and now:

a1) Black can engage in piece play on the queenside with 10 ... Rc8 11 Qh4 Qa5! 12 Bd2 Nb4 13 Kh1. As White prepares to lay siege on the black kingside, Black takes countermeasures.



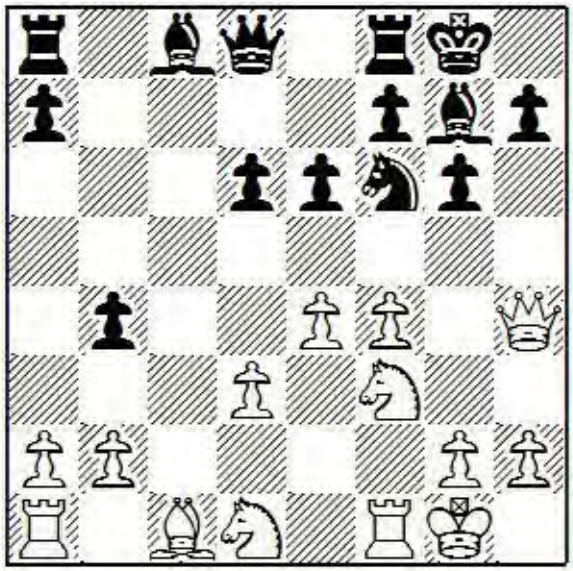
The point behind Black's queen sally is made evident here with his next move.

13 ... Qh5 14 Qf2 (White is just going to be worse if he exchanges queens so he needs to keep them on

for some aggressive chances) 14 ... Nd7 15 Ne1 (defending d3 and preparing to push Black back with h2-h3 and an eventual g2-g4, perhaps embarrassing Black's light-squared bishop which seems to have a paucity of safe squares to go to) 15 ... Nc5 16 h3 Ncxd3 (the start of an interesting idea though Gawain Jones mentions 16 ... Bf6 as an option, continuing 17 Kg1 Bd7 18 f5 Qh4 with the better game for Black) 17 cxd3 Bxh3!? (the bishop sacrifice is not strictly necessary as 17 ... Nc6 is a perfectly good alternative) 18 gxh3 Qxh3+ 19 Kg1 Nxd3 20 Nxd3 Bd4 and now the simplest way to end this game would be for White to take the bishop and allow perpetual check, J.Hector-N.Mikkelsen, Bronshoj 2010.

a2) Otherwise, Black can nullify the Nf3 before it becomes a danger (an idea also played in the Pirc Austrian Attack with the similar pawn structure) 10 ... Bxf3 11 Rxf3 e6 12 Kh1 (otherwise 12 b3 Rc8 13 Bb2 Nb4 14 Kh1 Nd7 15 Rd1 Nc5 16 e5 Ncxd3 17 cxd3 dxe5 18 fxe5 Nc2 19 Qe4 Qd4 has Black doing quite well, J.Hector-P.Wells, York 2000) 12 ... Rc8 13 Rf1 Re8 (also good is 13 ... d5 14 e5 Nd7 with the idea of ... f7-f6) 14 Qf2 a6 15 f5 Nd7 16 Qg3 Qb6 17 Nd1 (the pawn trade 17 fxe6 fxe6 18 Qxd6 Nc5 allows Black to win back his pawn with an excellent position) 17 ... Nce5 18 Be3 Qa5 19 Bg5 was played in J.Polgar-V.Topalov, Leon 1996, and now 19 ... exf5 20 exf5 Nxd3 21 cxd3 (21 Qxd3 Qb5 22 Qxb5 axb5 is perfectly fine for Black with his very active and well-placed pieces providing more than sufficient compensation for the somewhat messed-up pawn structure) 21 ... Qe5 22 fxg6 hxg6 is pleasant for Black.

b) Considering that Black can play ... b7-b5 without the preparation of 9 ... a6, it makes the move rather unnecessary. After 9 ... a6 10 Qe1 Nb4 11 Qh4 Nxd3 12 cxd3 e6,

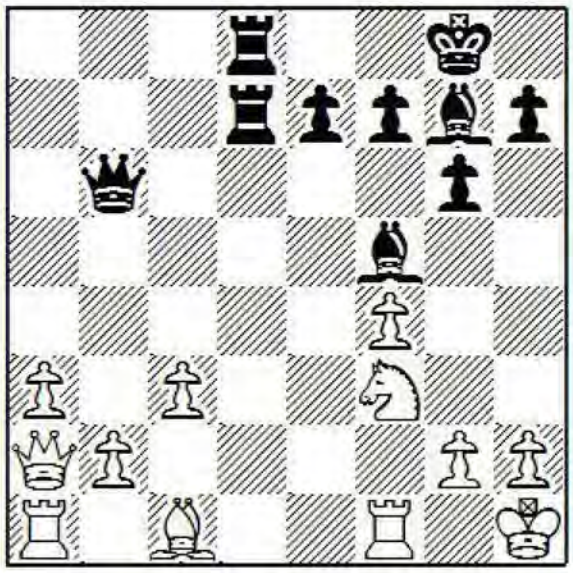


White can unleash the typical Grand Prix attack move 13 f5! exf5 14 Bg5 h6, Y.Masserey-D.Gurevich, Geneva 1992. Now White should continue 15 Bxh6 (instead 15 Nd5? hxg5 16 Nxg5 Re8 is winning for Black) 15 ... Qb6+ 16 Kh1 Qxb2 17 Rac1 Bxh6 18 Qxh6 Ng4 19 Qf4 Bd7 20 Nd5 and he is doing very well.

10 Qe1

This is the logical and normal continuation, but let's look at the alternatives:

a) White can ask Black to prove that the pawn sacrifice is sound with 10 Nxb5 Qb6+ 11 Kh1 Nxe4 12 Nxa7 (12 Bxe4 Qxb5 is pleasant for Black) 12 ... Rxa7 (12 ... Nc5 13 Nxc8 Rfxc8 leaves White a pawn up, but Black has excellent compensation thanks to his well-placed pieces) 13 Bxe4 Nb4 14 a3 d5 15 Bxd5 Nxd5 16 Qxd5 Bf5 17 c3 Rd7 18 Qa2 Rfd8.



This is a line given by Gawain Jones, offering the following evaluation "White may be two pawns up with three connected passed pawns but with the black rooks dominating the d-file and the black bishop pair looking magnificent, it is very difficult for White to get his own pieces going". In fact, my computer agrees with his evaluation, giving Black an advantage.

b) The other way to capture on b5 with 10 Bxb5 Qb6+ 11 Kh1 Nxe4 is good for Black.

c) 10 a3 also makes sense, stopping the knight from jumping to b4 and possibly discouraging Black from playing ... b5-b4. However, this didn't stop Black's b-pawn from advancing anyway in V.Ghukov-S.Ovsejevitsch, Krasnodar 1996 after 10 ... Bb7 11 Qe1 b4 12 Nd1 a5 13 Qh4 d5 (13 ... bxa3!? 14 Rxa3 Nb4 will kill the light-squared bishop) 14 Nf2?! (14 e5 Ne4 15 Be3 e6 is about even) 14 ... dxe4 15 Nxe4 Nxe4 16 Bxe4 f5 17 Bd3 Nd4 with Black wonderfully coordinated, whereas White's pieces look oddly out of sorts.

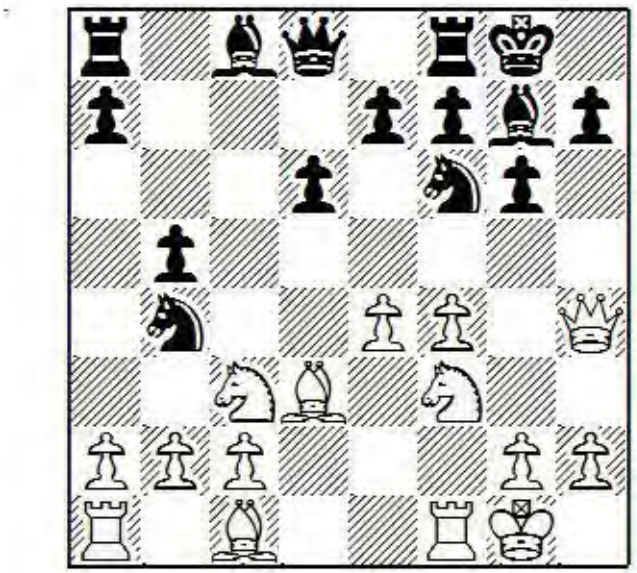
10 ... Nb4

Seeking to eliminate the Bd3 before it aids in a kingside attack. Black has another promising continuation available in 10 ... b4 11 Nd5 (11 Ne2 Ba6! 12 f5 Qb6+ 13 Kh1 Bxd3 14 cxd3 Qb5 15 Nf4 gxf5 was simply better for Black, S.Grover-I.Nataf, Reykjavik 2010) 11 ... Bb7:

a) The 12 f5?! Thrust, while certainly logical, makes it difficult for White to initiate a break-through on the kingside as long as Black get to place a knight on e5: 12 ... Nxd5 13 exd5 Ne5 14 fxg6 fxg6! (14 ... hxg6 is also possible, but is a lot more dangerous) 15 Qe4 Qa5 and now Black wins a pawn, J.Hector-I.Smirin, Antwerp 1994.

b) 12 Kh1 is a more recent and better try though after 12 ... a5 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6, White overextended with 14 e5?! Bg7 15 e6 f5 16 Ng5 Rf6 leaving Black with a pleasant position, M.Petrov-S.Sjugirov, Peristeri 2010.

11 Qh4



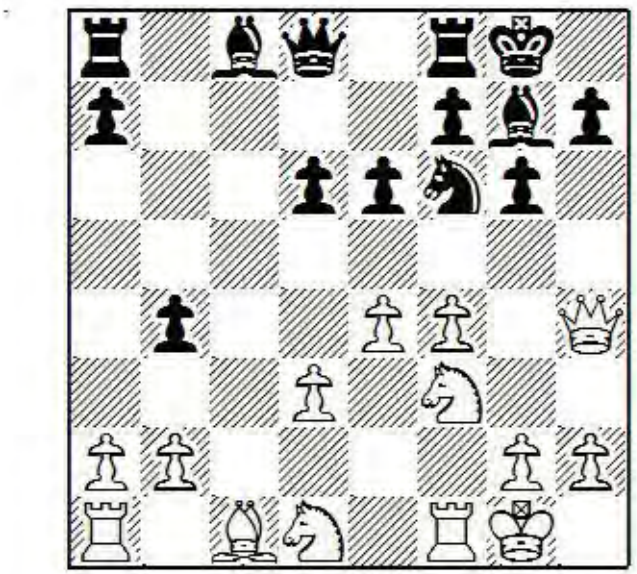
So now it's only f4-f5, Bh6, Ng5 when an fxg6 and Rxf6 exchange sac would see a decisive breakthrough. All very nice, but of course Black isn't going to be sitting around twiddling his thumbs!

11 ... Nxd3 12 cxd3 b4 13 Nd1

The other retreat 13 Ne2 allows 13 ... Ba6 which causes White a real headache. For instance, 14 e5 (14 Rd1? Nxe4 is even worse) 14 ... Nd7 15 e6 Bf6 16 Qh3 Nc5 leaves Black clearly better.

13 ... e6

With this move, Black has taken the sting out of White's attack, and thanks to the pair of bishops, Black has a tiny edge (but nothing more than that).



14 Be3 Ba6 15 Nf2 Nh5

Very provocative, inviting White to advance his g-pawn. However, this is the typical Grandelius brand of chess. Speaking of normal, 15 ... Nd7 16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 would have been the standard way to continue in this position, promising Black the better chances.

16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 17 g4 Nf6 18 Rac1?!

Logical, but not best. Instead, 18 Nd4 h5 19 g5 Ng4 20 Nxg4 hxg4 21 Rfd1 Rac8 is a tad better for

Black, thanks to his bishop pair.

18 ... h5!?

Black has an interesting alternative in 18 ... Nxe4 19 dxe4 Bxf1 20 Kxf1 Bxb2 21 Rc2 Bc3 with good winning chances for Black.

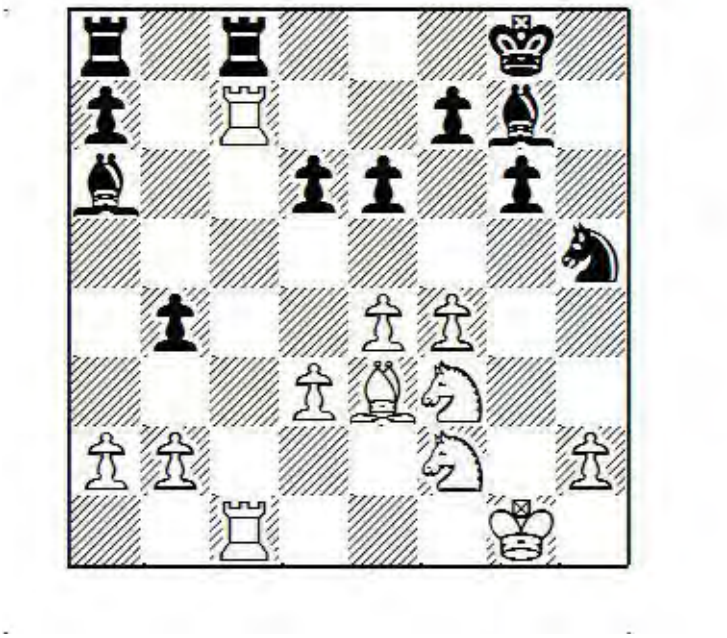
19 gxh5

This looks like a very strange decision. Why would White conceivably want to split up his pawns in this fashion? White's problem is that the alternatives are problematic too:

a) 19 g5 is met effectively by 19 ... Ng4! and now 20 Bd4 e5 21 fxe5 dxe5 22 Bc5 Nxf2 23 Kxf2 b3 24 axb3 Rxd3 is quite pleasant for Black.

b) 19 h3 hxg4 20 hxg4 Nxe4!? 21 dxe4 Bxf1 22 Kxf1 Bxb2 23 Rc2 Bg7 and Black stands well.

19 ... Nxh5 20 Rc7 Rdc8 21 Rfc1



White sacrifices a pawn to hold on to the c-file. However, 21 Rd7 Bb5 22 Rb7 is better and after 22 ... Rcb8 23 Rxb8+ Rxb8 24 e5 dxe5 25 fxe5 Rc8, Black has the edge but nothing serious.

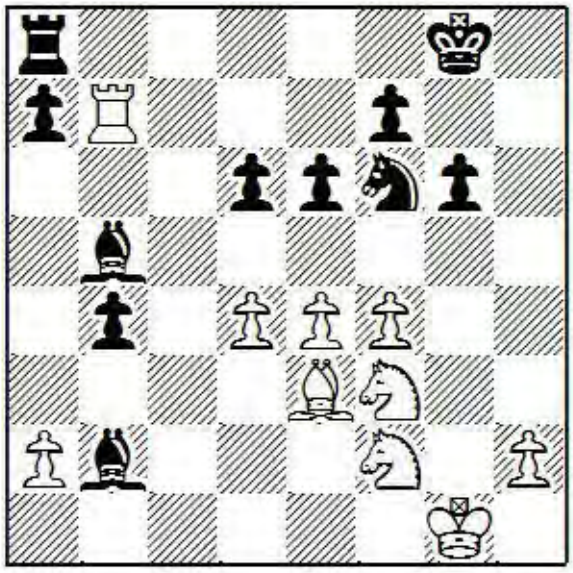
21 ... Bxb2 22 R1c6 Bb7 23 Rc4 Ba6 24 R4c6 Rxc7

Black could obviously repeat the moves with 24 ... Bb7 but he has probably worked out that he retains the edge despite allowing White a seventh-rank rook.

25 Rxc7 Bb5

Black takes a slower, careful approach. Ward mentions as an alternative, which looks very good after for example 25 ... Rc8!? 26 Rxa7 Bc1! 27 Bxc1 Rxc1+ 28 Kg2 Nxf4+ 29 Kg3 Nh5+ 30 Kg2 Bb5, and Black is better.

26 d4 Nf6 27 Rb7



27 ... a6

It is easy to think that this is Black's only move, but my computer spotted an elegant solution I hadn't thought of with 27 ... b3! 28 axb3 (now 28 Rxb5 loses to 28 ... bxa2) 28 ... Bc6 29 Rc7 Bxe4 30 Nxe4 Nxe4 and Black has an extra pawn and a much better pawn structure.

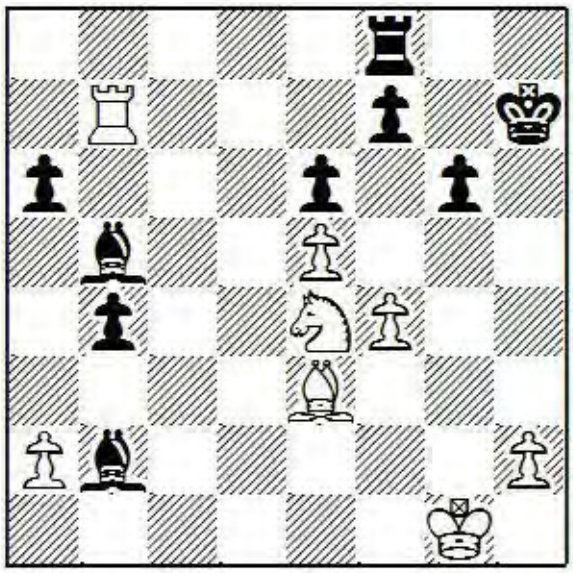
28 Ng5 Rf8!

This passive move is necessary since 28 ... Nd7 29 Ng4 Kg7 30 e5 d5 allows White back in the game with 31 Nf6! Rd8 (31 ... Nxf6?? 32 Rxf7+ is obviously not playable for Black) 32 Ra7 and Black can't proceed further.

29 e5 dxe5!

Black's only move. The alternative 29 ... Nd5? looks obvious and very tempting, but runs into 30 Ng4! (threatening all sorts of mayhem) and now Black must rally with 30 ... Bc6! (the only move as 30 ... Nxe3? 31 Nf6+! Kh8 32 Nxf7+ is simply game over) 31 Ra7 Rd8! 32 Nh6+ Kf8 33 Rxf7+ Ke8 34 Nxe6 Rd7 when Black survives but just barely so.

30 dxe5 Nh7 31 Nxh7 Kxh7 32 Ne4



Threatening Ng5+which would cramp Black's style considerably.

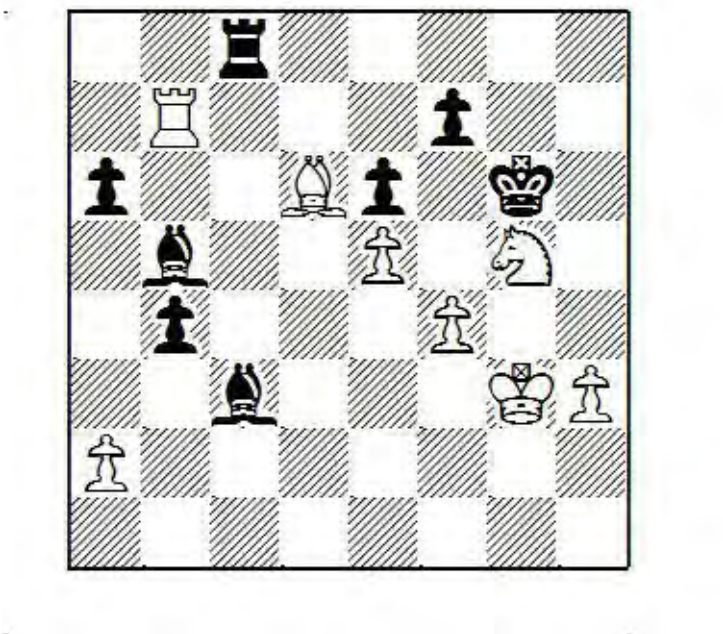
32 ... g5!?

A very pragmatic decision by Black, who decides to give up a pawn in order to have a more active king than what would be the case after something like 32 ... Kg8 33 Ng5, but Black may still have some winning chances after 33 ... Rc8! (33 ... Bc3 34 Rc7 is possibly fine for White) 34 Rxf7 Bc1 35 Bd4 Rc4 36 Rb7 Rxd4! 37 Rb8+ Kg7 38 Nxe6+ Kf7 39 Nxd4 Be3+ 40 Kg2 Bxd4, although this is by no means an easy or even clear win.

33 Nxg5+ Kg6 34 Kf2 Bc3 35 h3?!

Hector always keeps an eye on the opponent's king. The text move, while innocent-looking, takes the g4-square away from the black king (which could be important after a potential Bc5 followed by Rxf7). Nevertheless 35 Rc7 was slightly stronger, preventing the game continuation.

35 ... Bc4 36 Bc5 Rc8 37 Bd6 Bb5 38 Kg3??



Considering what happened here and on Black's subsequent move, it is quite likely that both players were in time trouble at this stage and as result, engage in mutual oversights. White should instead have played 38 Rxf7 Bd4+ 39 Kg2 (Ward on *Chesspublishing.com* offers 39 Kf3 Rc3+ 40 Ke4 Bb6 (threatening both ... Re3 and ... Bc6 mate) 41 Rf6+ Kh5 42 Rxe6 Bd3+ 43 Kd5 Bc4+ 44 Kc6 Bxe6+ 45 Kxb6 Bxa2 46 Bxb4 Rc4 with a likely draw) 39 ... Rc2+ 40 Kg3 Rc3+ 41 Kg2 Bc6+ 42 Kf1 Rc2 43 Rf8 Kh6 44 Bxb4 Bb5+ 45 Ke1 Be3 46 Rh8+ Kg7 47 Rd8 Rh2 48 Nxe6+ and the game is still ongoing, even if the computer calls it equal.

38 ... Bd4??

I think the young Grandelius may have thought that he was about to mate White by sending the rook to the back rank on the next move. But instead, he in fact lets White off the hook. The correct move was 38 ... Be1+! 39 Kg4 (not 39 Kh2 Rc2+ 40 Kg1 Bf2+ 41 Kh2 Bc6 when Black threatens 42 ... Bh4+ 43. Kg1 Rc1+ 44.Kh2 Rh1 mate) 39 ... Be2+ 40 Nf3 Rc3 and Black wins the knight and mates shortly after.

39 Bxb4!

A rather obvious move, but it does serve to take the c3-square away from the rook.

39 ... Rc1 40 Rxf7 Rg1+ 41 Kf3 Bc6+ 42 Ke2 Bb5+ 43 Kf3 Bc6+ 44 Ke2 Bb5+ ½-½

Black delivers perpetual check and a draw was thus agreed.

Game 20
B.Damljanovic-Ki.Georgiev
Karadjordje 2004

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 g3 Nc6 7 Bg2

With this, White allows the exchange of the knights on d4. The alternative 7 Nde2 is covered in the next game.

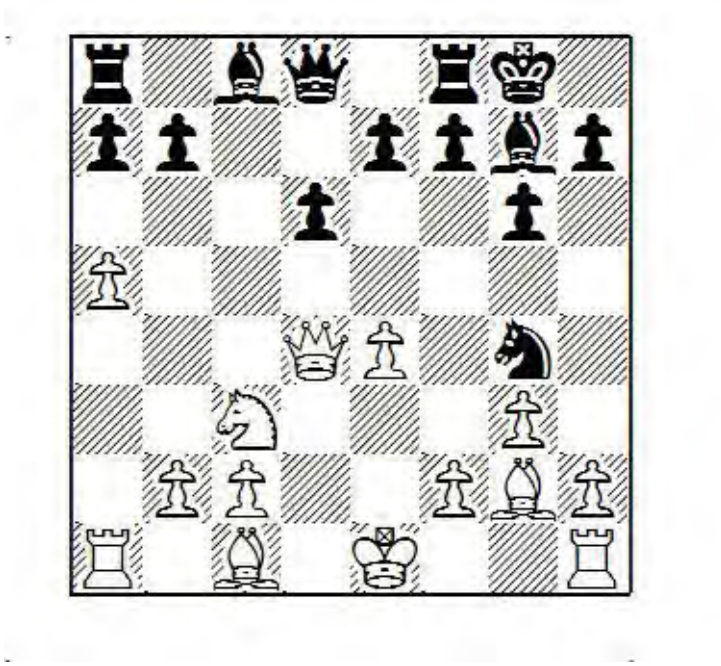
7 ... Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Bg7 9 a4

This could look a little strange and a bit unmotivated, but it is an attempt to reach the lines after 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qb4 that White desires, while avoiding Black's preferred lines, such as in the next game.

9 ... 0-0 10 a5

White gains space on the queenside and also prevents Black from booting the queen off its future b4-abode with ... a7-a5.

10 ... Ng4!?



Question: What is Black up to here? This move looks a bit odd.

Answer: Yes it is a bit odd, and if you are confused by this move, don't worry, its purpose will reveal itself shortly. The point is to interfere with White's plans on the queenside.

11 Qb4

Question: What is the point of this and what is the queen up to?

Answer: White intends to put the black queenside under positional pressure and prevent Black's c8-bishop from getting developed.

Question: Isn't it a bit risky to send the queen on adventures like that?

Answer: It looks that way, but such plans have been established as the way for White forward in this line.

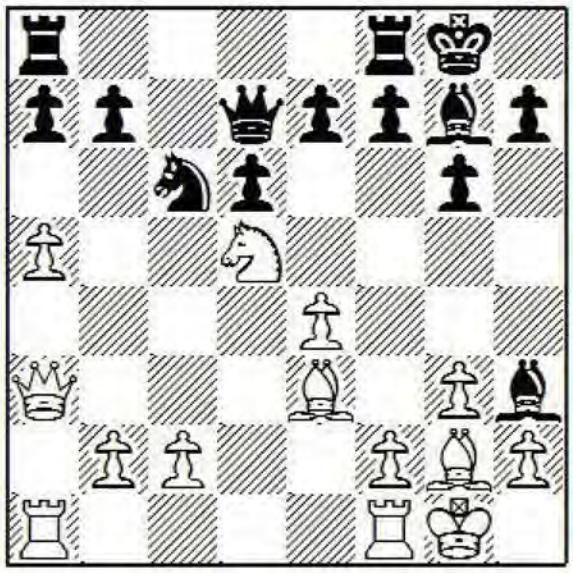
11 ... Ne5 12 Be3 Nc6

The point behind Black's knight manoeuvre is coming to light. The knight's transfer from f6 to c6 is designed to interfere with White's queenside initiative.

13 Qa3

This square is less ideal than b4, but White has to keep the a-pawn guarded.

13 ... Be6 14 0-0 Qd7 15 Nd5 Bh3



In this type of position where Black doesn't have his usual queenside counterplay or the ... d6-d5 central break, Black can in some cases consider ... f7-f5, but in this exact position, it is a little premature. For example, 15 ... f5 16 Nf4 fxe4 (or 16 ... Bc4 17 Rfd1 fxe4 18 Bxe4 is also better for White, as indicated by Ftacnik) 17 Bxe4 Bf7 18 Rad1 and White is clearly in control and will remain so, unless Black can get his central pawns rolling.

16 Rad1 Rac8?!

A more obvious choice for Black is the immediate execution of the natural plan of ridding White of the light-squared bishop and initiate the kingside counterplay with 16 ... Bxg2 17 Kxg2 f5 18 Qb3 Kh8 (Ftacnik) 19 exf5 Rxf5 20 Qa3 Raf8 and White's king will need to start looking for ways to plug the draft around his abode.

17 c4?!

This move appears to be entirely in tune with White's plans, grabbing control over the centre while restraining Black's game. However, it is not White's best choice. Instead, 17 Bxh3!?, which is typically not the kind of move that is recommended, serves to divert Black's queen from her defensive obligations and after 17 ... Qxh3 18 Bxa7!? Qe6! (18 ... Nxa7?! 19 Nxe7+ Kh8 20 Nxc8 Qxc8 21 c3 is very nice for White) 19 Qe3 Bxb2 20 c3 Nxa5 21 Qb6, White is a pawn up.

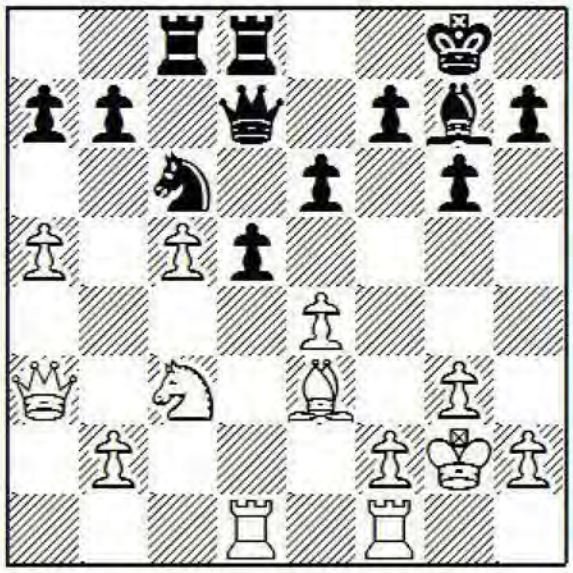
17 ... Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Rfd8?!

The Bulgarian grandmaster aims for a classical breakthrough in the centre. Though this isn't that bad a move, Black has a considerably better alternative available in 18 ... f5! 19 exf5 Qxf5 and here White needs to look for ways to limit Black's initiative, for example, with 20 Qd3 Qf3+ (or 20 ... e6!? 21 Nf4 Bxb2) 21 Kg1 Kh8 and Black is clearly having more fun.

19 c5 e6!

On 19 ... Qe6, Ftacnik offers 20 cxd6 Qxe4+ 21 f3 Qf5 22 Nxe7+ Nxe7 23 dxe7 Qc2+ 24 Rf2 Qxd1 25 exd8Q+ Rxd8 26 Bxa7 with somewhat better chances for White who has an extra pawn though his king's position is slightly compromised.

20 Nc3 d5



This doesn't look possible as the d-pawn will hang, but Black has some tactical resources available. However, 20 ... Be5, on the other hand, does not solve Black's problems as after 21 Bg5! f6 22 Be3, this little manoeuvre has weakened Black's overall pawn structure and secures White a slightly better game.

21 exd5 exd5 22 Bg5

The d5-pawn is weak, but White must play carefully as his king on g2 does not feel entirely safe.

Question: Can White nab the d-pawn without repercussions?

Answer: The pawn is pretty hot though White has to be careful how to go about doing it:

a) 22 Nxd5? is met by 22 ... Nd4! and after 23 Nf4 Qc6+ 24 f3 Nc2, Black has a very pleasant game.

b) 22 Rxd5 is a somewhat better alternative, as the threat to Black's queen doesn't allow for Black to create any immediate counterthreats against White's king. A possible continuation is 22 ... Qe6 23 Rd6 Rxd6 24 cxd6 Bxc3 25 Qxc3 Qxd6 26 Bh6 Qd5+ 27 Kg1 Qe5 and Black has obviously solved any immediate problems.

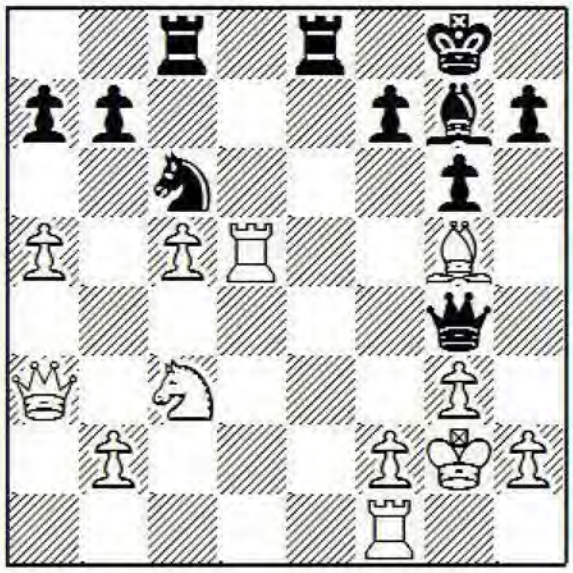
22 ... Re8

A safe alternative is 22 ... Bxc3 23 Qxc3 (23 Bxd8? is a disaster due to 23 ... Bb4!, leaving Black with a material advantage) 23 ... Re8 24 Bf6 Qf5 25 Bh8 d4 26 Bxd4 Nxd4 27 Qxd4 Qxc5 and most of the excitement has been pulled out of the position.

23 Rxd5

Once again 23 Nxd5? is met by 23 ... Nd4 and White has issues on the light squares. He will also not be able to hold on to his modest material advantage.

23 ... Qg4



24 Bf4?

An unfortunate move, as it does not aid in addressing White's primary concern – reducing Black's activity. Instead, 24 h3 Qc4 25 Rd7 a6 26 Rxb7 (26 Rfd1?? Bxc3! 27 bxc3 Qe4+ 28 Kg1 Ne5 is curtains for White) 26 ... Nxa5 27 Qxa5 Rxc5 28 Qb4 Qxb4 29 Rxb4 Rxg5 is a draw.

24 ... Nd4 25 f3 Qe6 26 Rd1

White carelessly takes a guard away from his king, which could have been punished immediately on the next move but the position is very messy and not easy to navigate.

Better alternatives are:

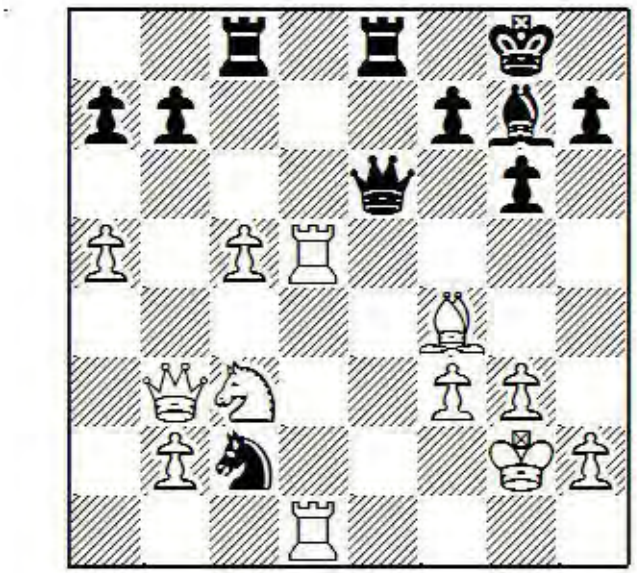
a) 26 Rd6 Qc4 27 Qa4 Qxc5, and despite horrible piece coordination, White is able to hold his position together.

b) 26 Rf2!? Nxf3!? 27 Rxf3 Bxc3 28 Qb3 Qe2+ 29 Rf2 Qe4+ 30 Rf3 Bxa5 31 c6 b5 and the complicated struggle continues, though White's position looks somewhat disjointed.

26 ... Nc2?

This knight has been dancing all day, but the journey should have come to an end here with 26 ... Nxf3! 27 Kxf3 (27 Rd6? Ne1+ 28 Kf2?! Qh3 is obviously much worse) 27 ... Bxc3 28 Kg2 (not 28 Qxc3?? Qe2 mate) 28 ... Qe4+ 29 Kh3 Bb4 30 Qd3 Qe6+ 31 Kg2 Rxc5 32 Rxc5 Bxc5 and Black is a pawn up with the clearly better chances.

27 Qb3!



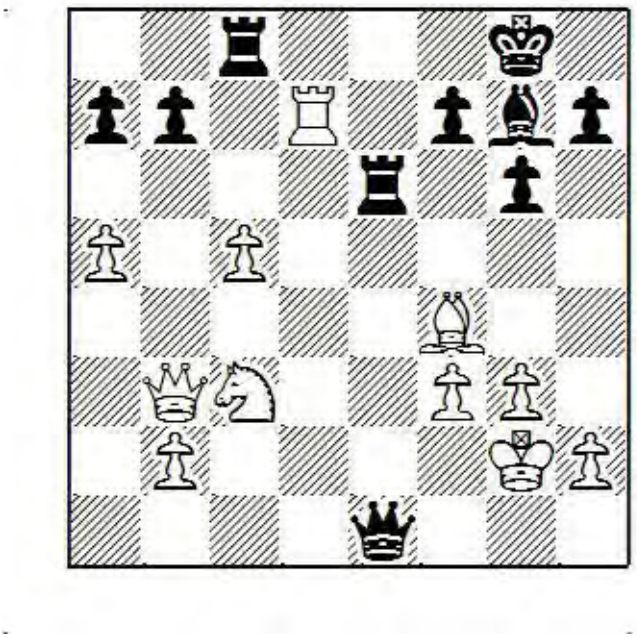
A strong square for the queen where it eyes the b7- and f7-pawns simultaneously. On the other hand, 27 Qa4 Ne1+ 28 Rxe1 (28 Kf2?? loses on the spot to 28 ... Bxc3) 28 ... Qxe1 29 Rd1 Qe6 30 Ne4 Red8 31 Bd6 h6 leaves Black with a small advantage. White is an exchange down but his pieces are reasonably well-placed.

27 ... Ne1+ 28 Rxe1!

The only move that keeps White in the game. The alternatives lose more or less rapidly, for instance, both 28 Kf2 Bxc3 or 28 Kg1 Qh3 29 R1d2 Nxf3+ wins for Black.

28 ... Qxe1 29 Rd7 Re6

The alternative 29 ... Rf8 also allows White approximately even chances, say after 30 Rd1 Qe6 31 Qxe6 fxe6 32 Ne4.



30 Rd1?!

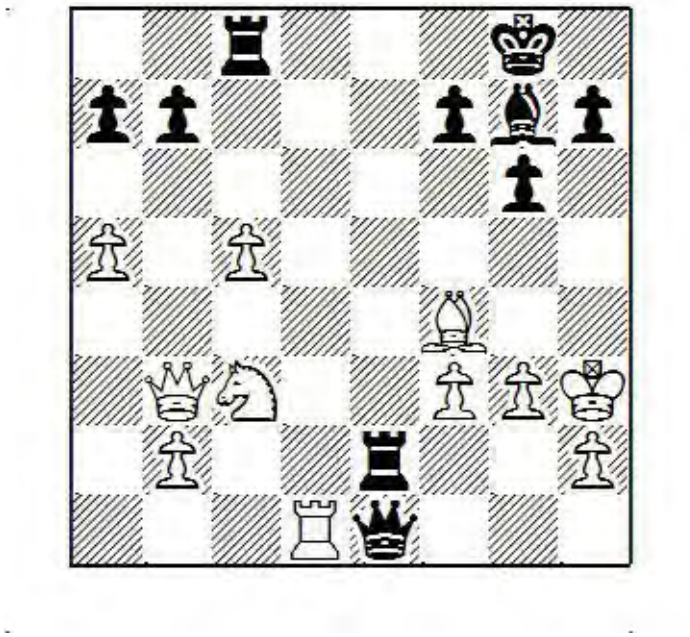
White has a much better option in 30 Qxb7! after which Black does best to aim for the drawn endgame after 30 ... Re2+ 31 Nxe2 Qxe2+ 32 Kh3 Rxc5 33 Rd8+ Bf8 34 Rxf8+ Kxf8 35 Qa8+ Kg7 36 Bh6+ Kxh6 37 Qf8+ Kg5 38 Qxc5+ f5 and there is no way for either side to win the queen ending.

30 ... Re2+ 31 Kh3?

I'm not entirely sure what White thought was happening, but this cannot be good.

Instead, 31 Nxe2 appears to hold the balance after 31 ... Qxe2+ 32 Kh3! Bf6 33 Qd3 Qe6+ 34 Kg2

Rxc5 35 Bh6 Re5 36 Rd2.



Question: What zwischenzug did Black have here which makes 31 Kh3 a bad move?

Answer: He can trade into a favourable ending with a snap deflection combination.

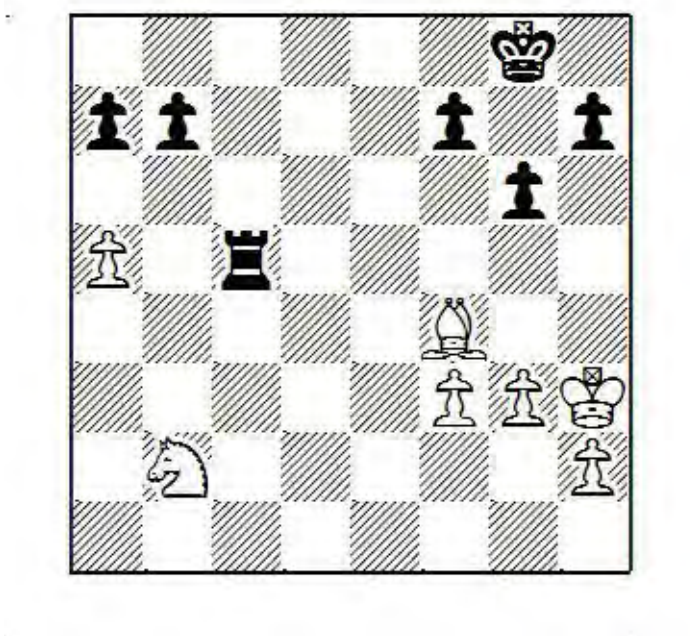
31 ... Rxb2!

White has no choice but to enter into an inferior bishop and knight versus rook and passed pawns continuation.

32 Qxb2 Qxd1!

Less accurate is 32 ... Qxc3?! 33 Qxb7 Qxc5 34 Be3 Qh5+ 35 Kg2 Qf5 (or 35 ... Rc2+ 36 Rd2 Rxd2+ 37 Bxd2 Bd4 38 Qa8+ Kg7 39 Bb4 and Black has a tough defensive task) 36 Bf2 and White has the initiative.

33 Nxd1 Bxb2 34 Nxb2 Rxc5



35 a6!?

This is the lesser of many evils, but it still is pretty terrible. The knight and bishop are not exactly known for their ability to work well together. On top of that, the knight will have a torrid time in fending

off the passed doubled a-pawns. To top it all, here White's king is ridiculously far away from the action. Finally, defending the a-pawn with 35 Bd2? loses on the spot to 35 ... Rc2.

35 ... bxa6

This may not look lost, but it is pretty near to hopeless as we just discussed in the previous comment.

36 g4 a5 37 Kg3 Rc2 38 Na4

Also, after 38 Be5 f5 39 g5 Kf7 40 h3 Ke6 41 f4 Kd5 42 Kf3 Kc5, with the king's support, Black will start pushing the a-pawn(s) forward with decisive effect.

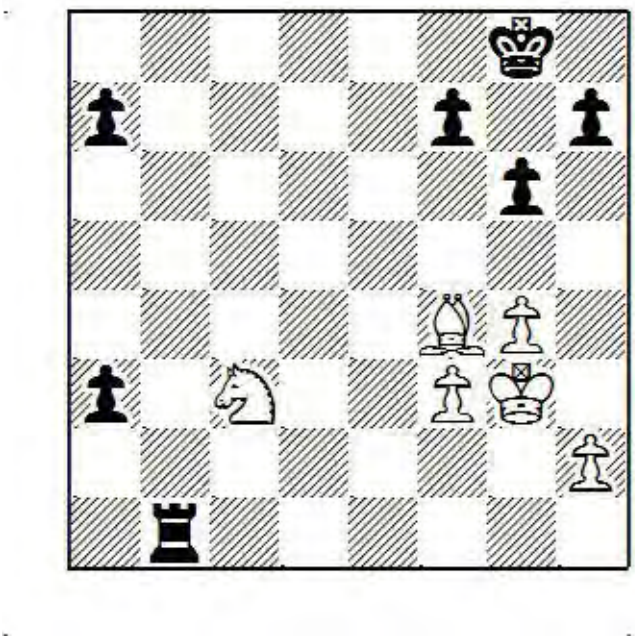
38 ... Rc4 39 Nb2 Rb4 40 Nd3

Or 40 Be5 a4 followed by ... a3 and White is toast.

40 ... Rb5 41 Nc1 Rb1 42 Ne2

Also futile is 42 Na2 a4 43 Be5 a3 44 Nc3 Rc1 followed by ... Rc2 and ... a3-a2.

42 ... a4 43 Nc3 a3!



44 Be5

The a-pawn cannot be stopped after 44 Nxb1 a2.

44 ... Rc1 45 Na2

There is no way out for White as 45 h4 Rc2 46 Nd5 a2 47 Nb4 Re2 48 Bc3 Rd2 49 Kf4 a5 50 Nc6 a4 51 Nb4 a3 52 Ke3 Rb2 is lost as the a-pawns will cost White his minor pieces.

45 ... Rc2 46 Nb4 Re2 47 Bf6 a2 48 Nd3 Re6 49 Ba1 Re3 0-1

White had finally had enough and threw the towel into the ring.

Game 21
M.Adams-V.Kramnik
Wijk aan Zee 1998

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 d6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 g3 g6 7 Bg2 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qb4

White tries to make Black's development of the queenside slow and cumbersome with this restraining move. In another game by Adams, against a fire-breather, he tried 10 a4, but after 10 ... Qa5!? 11 Qd3 Bd7 12 Nd5 Nxd5 13 Qxd5 Qxd5 14 exd5 Bf6! 15 c3 a5!, the resulting endgame represented no great threat to Black, who eventually outplayed White in M.Adams-HYDRA (computer), London 2005.

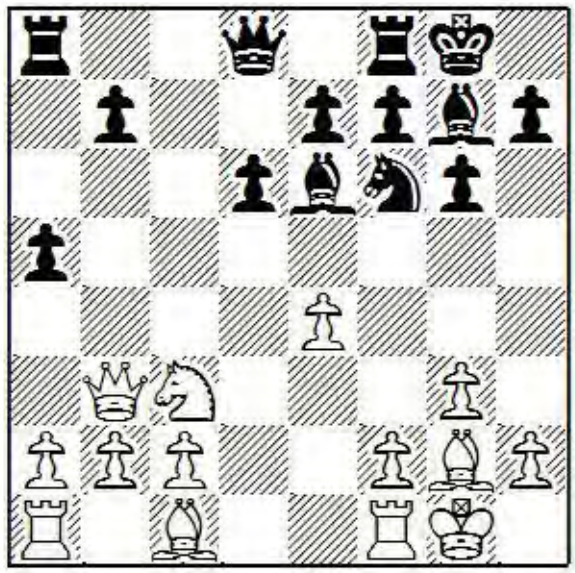
Question: Okay, I'm beginning to get the hang of this, so now Black plays 10 ... Ng4 like in the previous game?

Answer: Well, you could play 10 ... Ng4 and it has in fact been played by the English Grandmaster and Dragon specialist Gawain Jones. But in the present game, Kramnik introduced another idea.

10 ... a5!?

Black also has other moves available, but even if playable, they do tend to take the game in a direction preferred by White. For example, after 10 ... Qc7 11 Qb3 Be6 12 Nd5 Nxd5 13 exd5 Bf5 14 c3, White has a slight but nagging advantage in Ye Jiangchuan-Xu Jun, Shenyang 2000.

11 Qb3 Be6!



Ahead of the present main game, conventional wisdom was that Black needed to guard the b7-pawn before developing the bishop, as in M.Adams-N.Short, Groningen 1997. Short thus played 11 ... Rb8 12 a4 Nd7 13 Be3 b6 14 Rfd1 Bb7 15 Bd4 Bxd4 16 Rxd4 Nc5 with more or less even chances. Adams clearly didn't mind repeating this line against Kramnik. However, Kramnik's next move more or less sent this line out of business for White. The line certainly wasn't an attractive option amongst stronger players any longer.

12 Nd5

Taking Black up on the offer to collect the b7-pawn is playable though passive after 12 Qxb7 Bc4 (or 12 ... Nd7!? 13 Qb5 Rb8 14 Qg5 Bf6 15 Qe3, D.Barua-M.Venkatesh, Visakhapatnam 2004, and here 15 ... Qc7 promises Black the better chances) 13 Rd1 Nd7 14 Qc6 (14 Be3 Rb8 15 Qc6 Ne5 16 Qa4 Rb4 is ugly for White and the queen certainly is in trouble, Z.Jusic-M.Jirovsky, Stockerau 1991) 14 ... Nc5 15 e5 Rc8 16 Qf3 Bxe5 and Black has won the pawn back with the more actively-placed pieces, S.Dovliatov-R.Ibrahimov, Baku 2011.

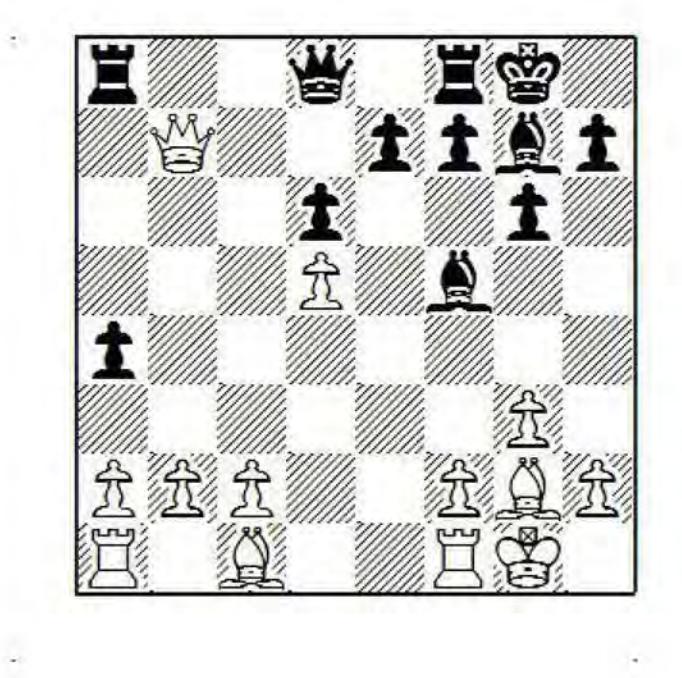
12 ... a4!

Annexing more space while egging White to capture the b-pawn. Black also sets up a potential ... a4-a3 hit.

13 Qxb7

Declining the pawn with 13 Qa3 Nxd5 14 exd5 Bf5 15 c3 Qc7 (15 ... Bd3!? 16 Re1 Re8 17 Be3 Qa5 offers Black an excellent alternative) 16 Re1 Rfe8 17 Be3, J.Lopez Martinez-P.Smirnov, Warsaw 2005, would have offered Black the more pleasant position after 17 ... Bd3 18 Red1 Bc4 19 Qb4 b5.

13 ... Nxd5 14 exd5 Bf5



Question: Okay, White has picked up a pawn, so what is Black getting in return?

Answer: Like in the Benko Gambit, Black has fantastic pressure on the queenside down the open files and long diagonals, and White has very limited ways of dealing with this pressure.

15 Bg5

White has nothing better than to complete development. 15 c3 is hardly any better, after say 15 ... a3 16 Qb3 Qc7! (16 ... axb2 17 Qxb2 Qa5 18 Bd2 was given as "unclear" by Ward, but even this looks suspect for White after 18 ... Rfb8 19 Qc1 Ra7 and Black's active dominating pieces more than compensate for the one pawn deficit) 17 Qd1 Rfb8 18 Qe2 axb2 19 Bxb2 Qb7 and White's position collapses entirely.

15 ... Qb8!

Just as in the Benko, Black is not afraid to exchange the queens.

16 Qxb8 Rfxb8

Black's queenside pressure ensures he regains the pawn with interest.

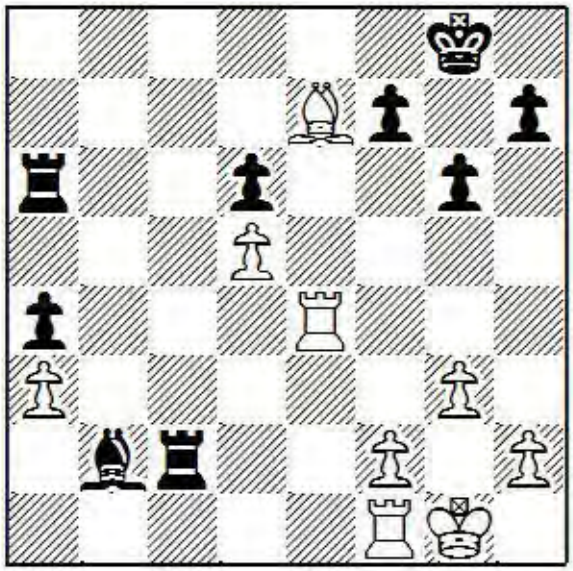
17 Bxe7 Rxb2 18 a3 Rxc2 19 Rae1

Also, 19 Rac1? doesn't help White either after 19 ... Rxc1 20 Rxc1 Bb2 21 Rc6 Re8 22 Rc7 Bxa3 and Black will follow up with ... Bc5 and ... a4-a3 with a routine win.

19 ... Ra6

White has yet to lose any material, but Black's pieces are ideally placed, whereas the same can hardly be said about White's pieces.

20 Be4 Bxe4 21 Rxe4 Bb2



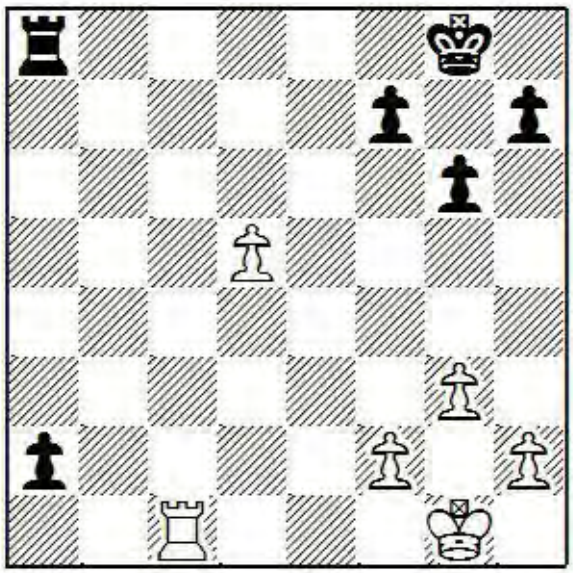
22 Rfe1?

A better try is 22 Re3 though Black is the one with all the chances after 22 ... Bd4 23 Rf3 Bc5 24 Rb1 Ra8 followed by ... Ra2.

22 ... Rc1!

Black still needs to exercise a little care. For instance 22 ... Bxa3?? would be tragic on account of 23 Bf6 and Black cannot prevent mate.

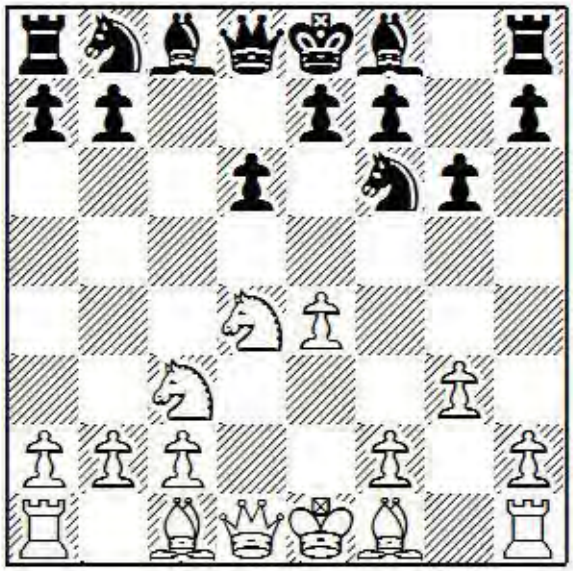
23 Rxc1 Bxc1 24 Bf6 Ra8 25 Rc4 Bxa3 26 Bd4 Bc5 27 Bxc5 dxc5 28 Rxc5 a3 29 Rc1 a2 0-1



White can obviously stop the pawn with 30 Ra1, but Black will simply send his king up to d6, collect the d-pawn after which the passivity of White defensive set-up will spell his doom. Adams clearly didn't need Kramnik to demonstrate that he could figure that out.

Game 22
N.Firman-R.Svane
German League, Hamburg 2014

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 g3



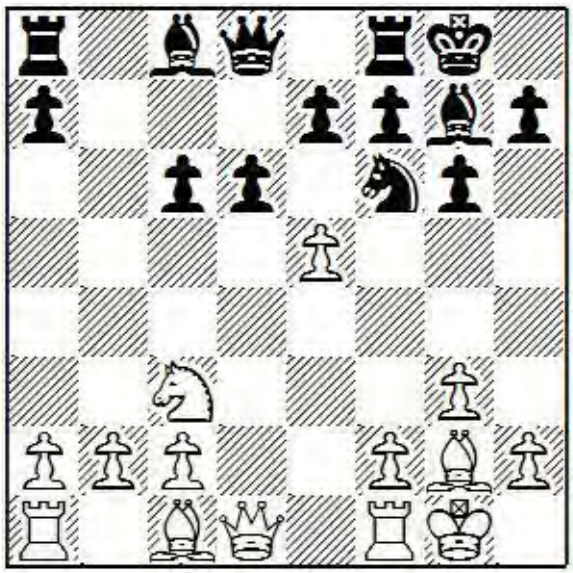
6 ... Bg7

As we have seen in the other games, normally Black prefers to play 6 ... Nc6 first, forcing White to make a decision regarding the d4-knight.

7 Bg2 0-0 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Nde2

Let's look at the key alternatives:

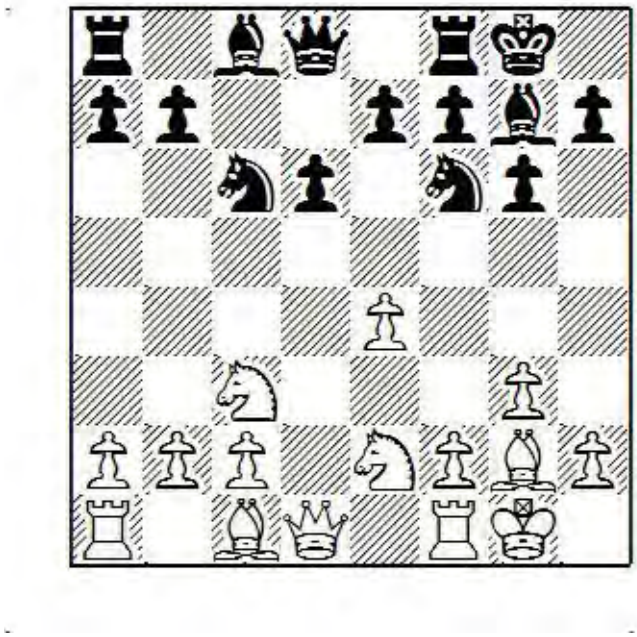
a) The reason why 6 ... Nc6 is normally given the preference is that White now has the opportunity to play 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 e5 which is supposed to be better for White.



That, however, is not even clear. In fact, the resulting positions are quite unbalanced and not unfavourable for Black after 10 ... dxe5 11 Bxc6 Rb8 12 Qxd8 Rxd8 13 Ba4 Bg4 14 f3 Bh3 15 Re1 e4 16 Nxe4 Nxe4 17 fxe4 Rb4 18 Bb3 Bd4+ 19 Be3 Bxb2 and interestingly enough, it is Black who has the better pawn structure and the more comfortable position, H.Hernandez Carmenates-L.Dominguez, Camaguey 1999.

b) Another move is the other retreat, 9 Nb3 which has been played too often (because the knight typically ends up being misplaced on b3). Black obtains a good game with 9 ... Bg4!? 10 f3 Be6 11 Kh1 b5 12 a4 bxa4 (12 ... b4!? is possibly better) 13 Rxa4 Nd7 14 f4 Nb6 15 Ra1 a5 16 Nd5 a4 17 Nd2 Bd7

18 Ra3 Na5 and Black is in command, B.Damljanovic-G.Kasparov, Belgrade 1989.



9 ... Rb8 10 a4

This is the better move here. Black will still get to play ... b7-b5, but the a-file will be opened for the rook. Let's see the alternatives:

a) After 10 Nd5?! b5 11 c3 b4! 12 cxb4 Nxb4 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6 14 Be3 Qd7, Black gets a very nice position, A.Hnydiuk-V.Popov, Cappelle La Grande 2000.

b) 10 h3 b5 11 Nd5 Nd7 12 c3 e6 13 Nb4 Nxb4 14 cxb4 Nb6 15 Bf4, M.Garcia Carbo-V.Baklan, Sabadell 2007, and now 15 ... Nc4 16 Nc3 a5 would be quite pleasant for Black.

10 ... a6

This looks like the logical continuation to follow up with ... Rb8 with a genera queenside advance. Of course, it won't hurt to get the rook off the long White diagonal. An interesting alternative is 10 ... b6!? and following 11 h3 Ba6 12 Re1 Qd7 13 Be3 Rfc8 14 f4 Na5 15 Bf2 Bb7, Black has a pleasant game, D.Bocharov-I.Kovalenko, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013.

11 Nd5

A major alternative for White is 11 h3, taking the g4-square away from the knight, thus allowing for the dark-squared bishop to develop to e3 without interruption from Black. A high level encounter saw 11 ... b5 12 axb5 axb5 and 13 Nd5 (13 Be3 b4 14 Nd5 Nd7 15 Ra2 e6 16 Ndf4 Qe7 17 b3 Bb7 18 Qd2 Rfd8 19 Rd1 Nc5 is comfortable for Black, I.Malakhov-V.Zvjaginsev, St Petersburg 2013) 13 ... Nd7 14 c3 e6 15 Ne3 Qc7 16 Nd4 b4 17 Nxc6 Qxc6, E.Alekseev-P.Svidler, Moscow 2008, and Black should not be unhappy with the outcome of the opening.

11 ... b5

Equally common is 11 ... Nd7 when after 12 c3 b5 13 axb5 axb5 14 Nd4 Nde5 15 Bg5 h6 16 Be3 Bd7 17 b3 e6 18 Nf4 Qc7, chances are about even, A.Torrecillas Martinez-M.Leon Hoyos, Barcelona 2011.

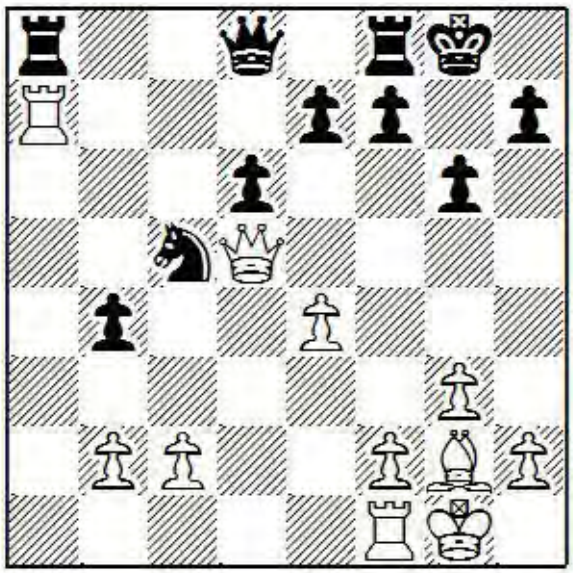
12 axb5 axb5 13 Bg5

With Black likely to transfer the king's knight anyway, this move strikes me as odd as it leaves the bishop oddly staring into nothing. That being said, it has been played by several strong players, so that may indicate that I might (though I doubt it) be missing something in the overall picture. There are several alternatives that make more sense to me:

a) 13 Be3 b4 14 Nd4 (or 14 Ra2 Ng4 15 Bg5 h6 16 Bc1 e6 17 Ne3 b3 18 cxb3 Nge5 19 Bd2 Qb6 20 Bc3 Ba6 is about even, V.Ivanchuk-V.Kramnik, Horgen 1995) 14 ... Nxd4 15 Bxd4 Nxd5 16 exd5 Bxd4 17 Qxd4 Bf5 18 Ra7 Re8 19 Re1 Qb6 20 Qxb6 Rxb6 leads to a drawish endgame, Z.Efimenko-

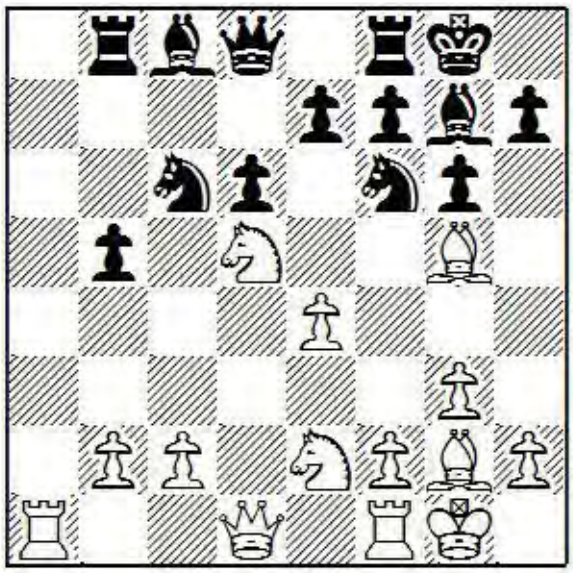
M.Mchedlishvili, Baku 2013.

b) 13 Bd2 Nd7 14 Bc3 Bxc3 15 Nexc3 b4 16 Ne2 Nc5 17 Nd4 Bb7 18 Nxc6 Bxc6 19 Ra7 Bxd5 20 Qxd5 Ra8 is evaluated as equal by the engines I have consulted.



I cannot help but think that Black's position is easier to play. The c5-knight looks like a much better piece than the g2-bishop and the c2-pawn is likely going to be more vulnerable than the isolated b4-pawn, H.Blanco-F.Corrales Jimenez, Las Tunas 2009.

c) 13 c3!? b4 14 Nd4 (14 c4 Nd7 15 Rb1 e6 is fine for Black, F.Vallejo Pons-V.Kramnik, Internet (blitz) 1999) 14 ... Nxd4 15 Nxf6+ exf6 16 cxd4 f5 17 Be3 fxe4 18 Bxe4 was M.Mertens-Y.Zinchenko, Pardubice 2005 and now 18 ... Be6 19 Qd2 d5 is approximately balanced.



13 ... Ng4!?

Black is certainly taking advantage of the fact that White has omitted to play h2-h3.

Question: It seems that Black has some sort of affinity to this move in this particular variation. Is there any significant difference between this knight sally and 13 ... Nd7?

Answer: While 13 ... Nd7 may lead to the same kind of positions as the move in our main game, it also limits Black's options. For instance

after 14 Qc1, Black doesn't have the option of playing ... h6 if he should so desire. However, Black can try 14 ... Re8 15 Rd1 Nc5 (15 ... b4 16 c3 bxc3 17 Nexc3 Nc5 18 Rb1 Bg4 leaves Black's pieces nicely coordinated, V.Onischuk-E.Can, Kocaeli 2014) 16 h3 b4 17 Be3 Bd7 18 Nd4 Qc8 19 Nxc6 Bxc6 20 Bd4 Bxd5 21 exd5 Qf5 with another comfortable position for Black, M.Al Modiahki-S.Tiviakov, Bled 2002. If White exchanges on g7, Black's knight looks a lot more impressive than the g2-bishop, and should he exchange on c5, then the dark-squared bishop is definitely stronger the light-squared counterpart.

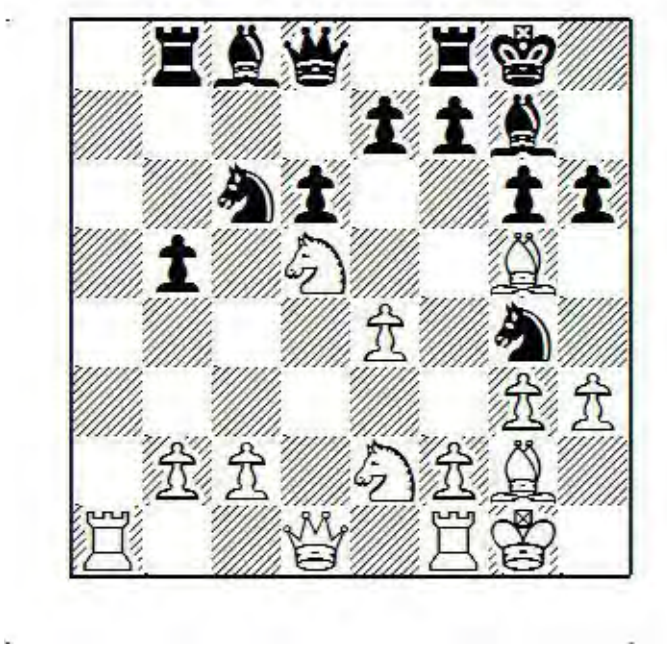
Question: Does it make sense for Black to trade knights instead of taking evasive action?

Answer: From a positional viewpoint, Black should not do so as after 13 ... Nxd5?! 14 exd5 Ne5 15 Nd4 is probably a little better for White because of the c6-hole.

14 h3

In the light of the next couple of moves, it makes sense to look at the alternatives. One good one is 14 c3 h6 15 Bd2 e6 16 Ne3 Nge5 when the chances are about balanced.

14 ... h6!?



Question: What's the point of this move?

Answer: Actually this is an important decision. While 14 ... Nge5 is perfectly playable, the text move forces White to make a decision regarding the dark-squared bishop. With the e3-square not being available (due to ... Nxe3), White then will have to place the bishop on a less attractive square.

15 Bc1

It is certainly worth looking at the alternatives at this point:

a) 15 Bxe7?! seems logical in terms of Black's pawn but after 15 ... Nxe7 16 Nxe7+ Qxe7 17 hxg4 Bxg4 the strength of Black's bishop pair (especially the g7-beast) means that Black has more than adequate play to compensate for a weak d-pawn.

b) 15 Bd2!? is possibly best, although 15 ... Nge5 16 Qc1 (16 b3 e6 17 Ne3 Qb6 18 Kh2 Bb7 19 Rc1 Rbc8 was already comfortable for Black, S.Pucher-R.Svane, Metz 2014) 16 ... Kh7 is hardly anything more than a reasonably balanced position.

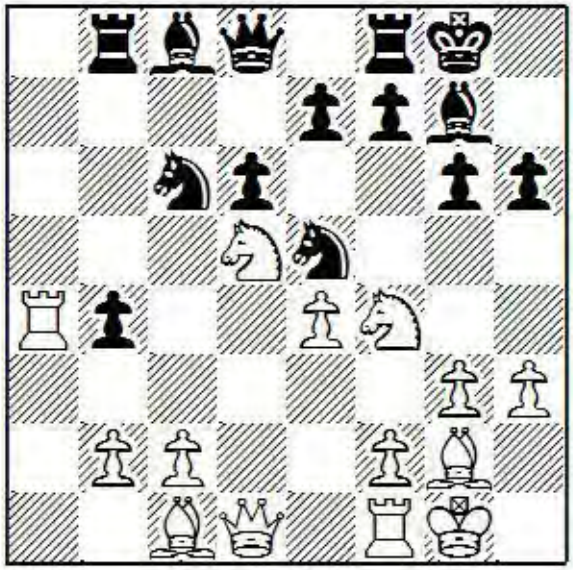
15 ... Nge5 16 Nef4?!

This move looks purposeful, but it is in fact rather clumsy, possibly even taking a square away from the d5-knight, which is likely to be evicted anyway. Instead, 16 Ra2 Bb7 17 b3 e6 18 Ne3 Qb6 19 Qd2 Rfd8 leaves chances fairly even.

16 ... b4

Claiming some more space on the queenside, while taking the c3-square away from the knight.

17 Ra4?!



This move seems to makes a lot of sense as it 'attacks' the b4-pawn, gets the rook off the a1-h8 diagonal and potentially prepares b2-b3 at some point to stem Black's queenside initiative. However, the rook is also somewhat loose on a4 and this can easily end up causing problems.

Nonetheless, an alternative like 17 Nd3 e6 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 Ne3 Qc7 looks comfortable for Black as well.

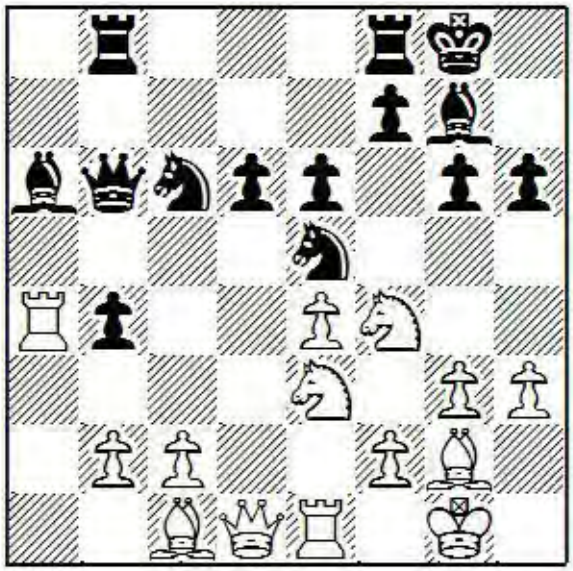
17 ... e6 18 Ne3 Qb6! 19 Re1?!

The start of a faulty plan. White has to dig in now and play carefully. Most definitely, he should not rush to nab the loose d6-pawn:

a) After 19 Qxd6?? Rd8!, White gets a cold shower as the queen is trapped.

b) The not immediately obvious 19 Ng4 is possibly better and after 19 ... Ba6 20 Be3 Qb7 21 Re1 Nxg4 22 Qxg4 Bb5 (Black should resist the temptation of nabbing the b2-pawn as after 22 ... Bxb2?? 23 Nxg6! fxg6 24 Qxg6+ Bg7 25 Qxe6+ Rf7 26 e5!, Black is serious trouble as White is poised to play 27 Bd5) 23 Ra2 Qc7 and Black has good control and is bit better thanks to his well-placed pieces as well as the superior overall piece coordination.

19 ... Ba6



Exercise: A positional challenge for you. Black is taking control over the light squares on the queenside. Should White challenge this by playing 20 Bf1?

20 Bf1?

Answer: It is hard to fault White for thinking that he had to something to challenge Black's domination on the queenside and light squares, but by offering the exchange of the light-squared bishops, all of his light squares are weakened including those on the kingside. Therefore the text move only helps to make things much, much worse.

However, the alternative 20 Nd3 doesn't look comforting after 20 ... Nxd3 21 cxd3 Bd4 with Black intending 22 ... Bb5 and 23 ... Ne5. Indeed, White has real issues dealing with the black initiative.

20 ... Bxf1 21 Rxf1 Nd4

Black is not merely eyeing the f3-square but has more threats looming. With the c6-square cleared, Black threatens ... Qc6, pointing a finger at both the e4-pawn on e4 and the loose a4-rook. Also, let's not forget that the d4-knight is also indirectly protected through an f3-check with the knight on e5. Trouble is definitely brewing for White.

22 f3

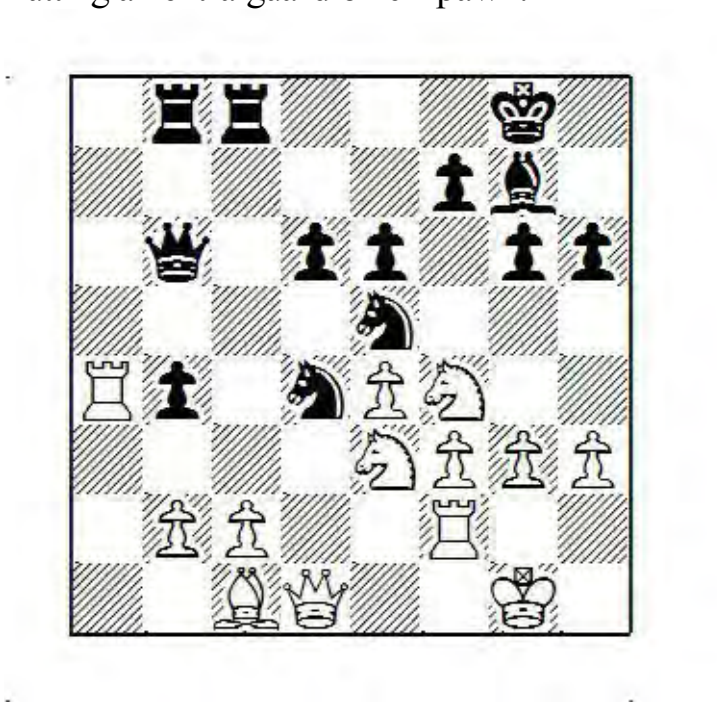
This really isn't what White wants to play, but his position is straining in all directions. For instance, after 22 Kg2 Qc6 23 b3 Ndf3, the e4-pawn can no longer be guarded.

22 ... Rfc8

Due to the e3-knight being pinned, Black now threatens 23 ... Nxc2. If White attempts to get the king away from the pin with 23.Kg2, then 23 ... Qc6 24.b3 Nxc2 simply wins a pawn for Black.

23 Rf2

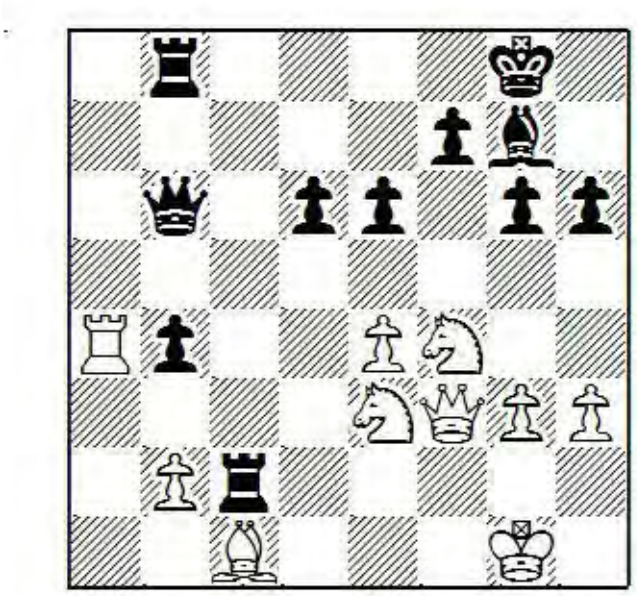
Putting an extra guard on c2-pawn.



Exercise: The position is ripe for a combination with the knights poised menacingly in the centre? What is Black's best move?

Answer: Forcibly enter the fray via the c-file by trading the two knights for rook and two pawn.

23 ... Ndxf3+! 24 Rxf3 Nxf3+ 25 Qxf3 Rxc2!



The point behind the exchanges on f3. As Chris Ward observes in his notes to this game, two knights for a rook and two pawns is often okay in most middlegames, but when White's position is as loose as it is here and with Black's rooks being able to utilise the open files freely, then the situation is different. White is in serious trouble, to say the least.

26 Ne2 Rbc8

Black decides to continue to apply pressure on White's position. However, the simple 26 ... Bxb2 27 Bxb2 Rxb2 wins without much effort.

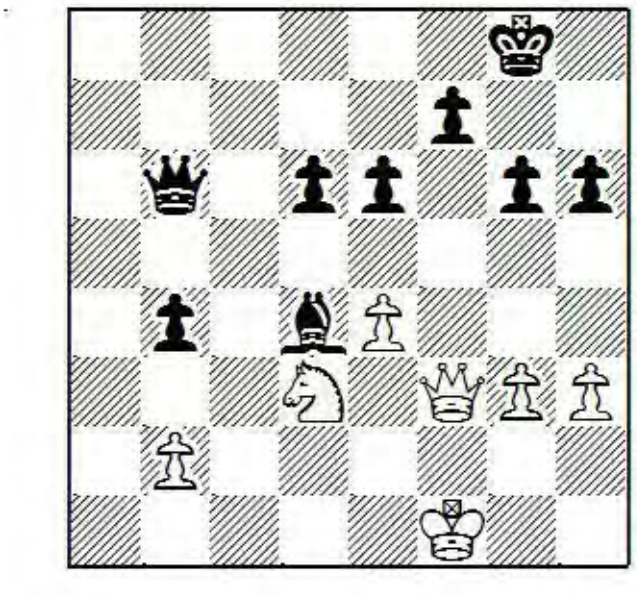
27 Ra1 Bd4

The Dragon bishop emerges to prepare the denouement.

28 Kf1 Rxc1+!

This little combination simplifies everything to an easily won endgame.

29 Rxc1 Rxc1+ 30 Nxc1 Bxe3 31 Nd3 Bd4



The queen and knight pairing is usually considered stronger than a queen and bishop combo because of their ability to create a multitude of threats. This however, is many light years away from happening and will only occur if the captain of the black ship falls asleep. In other words, resigning wouldn't be imprudent at this juncture.

32 b3 Qa6 33 Qe2 Qa1+ 34 Qe1 Qxe1+ 35 Kxe1

OK, White is two pawns down and the queens have come off, I guess White could have called it quits at this point, but he carries on a bit longer.

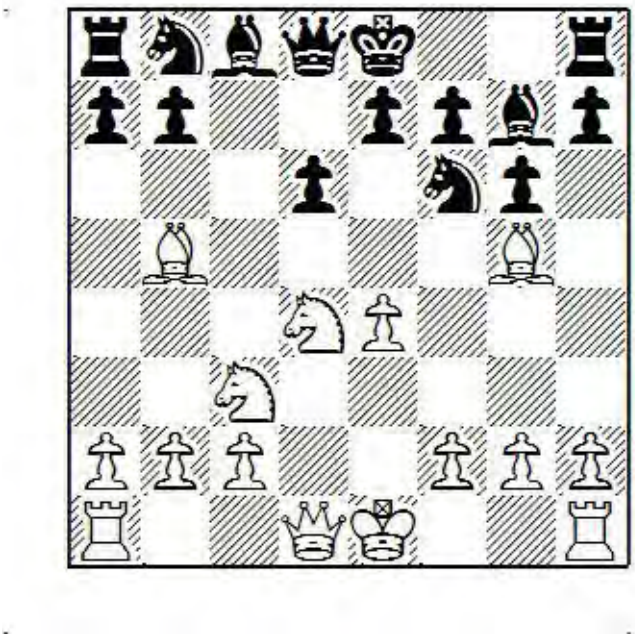
35 ... f5 36 exf5 gxf5 37 Ke2 Bc3 38 g4 fxg4 39 hxg4 Kf7 40 Nf4 Kf6 41 Kf3 d5 42 Nh5+ Ke5 43 Nf4 Bd2 44 Nd3+ Kd4 45 Ke2 Kc3 46 Nc5 e5 0-1

Now, White at long last decided to resign.

Game 23
V.Ivanchuk-V.Gashimov
Moscow (blitz) 2009

Yes, this is a blitz game, but I chose it anyway, because it illustrates an interesting new idea for Black and is played between two top grandmasters.

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Bg5 Bg7 7 Bb5+



This variation, which has been a favourite of Grandmaster Yurtaev, is largely harmless if Black just takes a little care. In essence, White's plan is to develop quickly with Bb5+, Qe2 and 0-0-0 and play a quick e4-e5 central break. The resulting positions may not always suit the black player.

7 ... Nbd7!?

This variation isn't very common, but may find more takers in the future as Black gets an easily playable position with almost no effort. The usual main line is 7 ... Bd7 and after 8 Qe2 Black needs to make up his mind on which way to go:

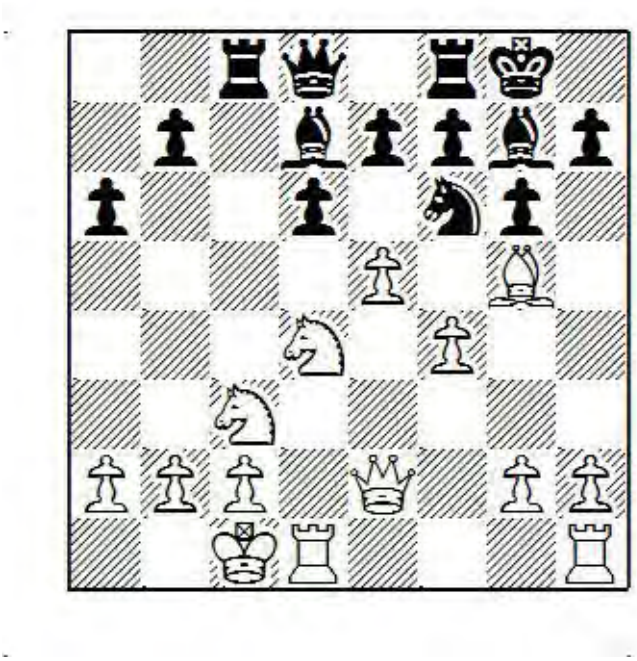
a) 8 ... a6 9 Bxd7+ Nbxd7 10 0-0-0 0-0 11 f4 Qc7 12 Rhe1 e5 13 Nf3 b5 14 Bxf6 Nxf6 15 f5 b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 Rxd5, A.Gupta-R.Babaev, Balaguer 2007, and after 17 ... a5 18 Red1, the computer assesses chances as even. White's position looks easier to play with the pressure along the d-file and easy expansion on the kingside.

b) 8 ... 0-0 9 0-0-0 Qa5 10 h4 (10 Rhe1 or 10 f4 can also be considered for White) 10 ... Rc8 11 Kb1 (11 Bxd7 Nbxd7 12 Nb3 Qd8 gives approximately even chances) 11 ... Rxc3! 12 Bxd7 Rc7?! (Black bails out from the exchange sacrifice when instead 12 ... Nbxd7! 13 Bd2 Nd5 14 exd5 Bxd4 15 bxc3 Bf6 leads to a better game for him) 13 Bb5 a6 14 Bd3 Nc6 15 Nb3 Qa4 16 c3 Rac8 17 Nd2 Ne5 gives mutual chances, C.Larduet Despaigne-Y.Gonzalez Vidal, Havana 2009.

c) 8 ... Bxb5 9 Qxb5+ Qd7 10 0-0-0 Nc6 11 Nb3 Rc8 (the surprising 11 ... Ng4! intending ... Bxc3 and threatening ... Nxf2 is possibly just better for Black, say after 12 Qe2 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Qe6 14 f4 0-0 15 Kb1 Rac8 16 h3 Nf6 17 Rhe1 Rfd8 and although Black is missing his beloved dark-squared bishop, he has the better chances thanks to his superior pawn structure) 12 f4 a6 13 Qb6 Qc7 14 Qxc7 Rxc7 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nd5 Rd7 17 Nxf6+ exf6 and Black has the inferior pawn structure but nevertheless went on to win from this slightly worse position, R.Ovetchkin-A.Timofeev, Togliatti 2003.

8 Qe2 0-0 9 0-0-0 a6 10 Bxd7 Bxd7 11 f4 Rc8!? 12 e5

It seems like White didn't evaluate the consequences of Black's next move carefully enough. A safer option is 12 Bxf6 Bxf6 13 e5 Bg7 14 e6 Bc6 15 exf7+ Rxf7 16 Ne6 Qa5 17 Nxg7 Kxg7 with roughly balanced chances.



Exercise: What is Black's best move?

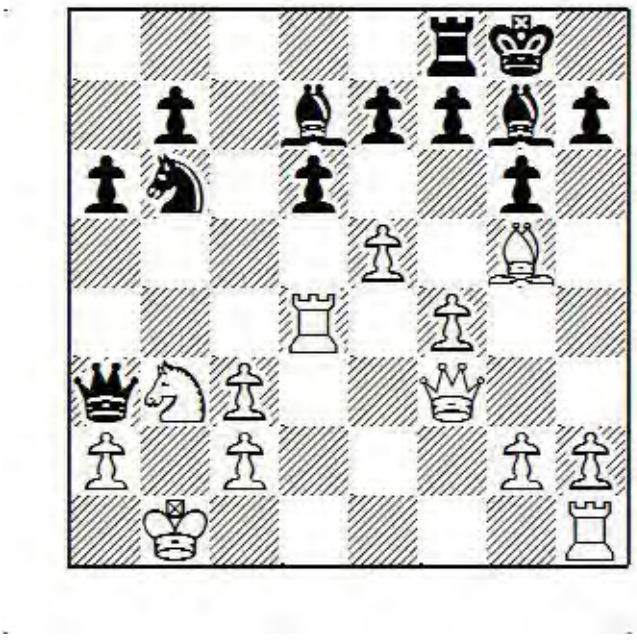
12 ... Rxc3!

Answer: This standard motif was of course the idea behind Black's previous move. This classic exchange sacrifice occurs in all lines of the Dragon and needs to be considered by both players as it always changes the nature and dynamics of the position.

13 bxc3

The tempting 13 exf6 is met by 13 ... exf6 14 Bh4 Re8 15 Qd2 Rce3 and Black is obviously in very good shape.

13 ... Nd5 14 Qf3 Qa5 15 Nb3 Qa3+ 16 Kb1 Nb6 17 Rd4



Question: Is there any issue for Black to trade centre pawns with ... dxe5 now?

17 ... dxe5??

This is a quick reminder that our game here is actually a blitz game. Black blunders into a losing position:

a) The correct move is 17 ... Bc6! and then after 18 Qh3 f6 19 exf6 exf6 20 Bh6 Bxh6 21 Qxh6 Na4 22 Rxa4 Qxa4, Black has the slightly better chances.

b) Another good option for Black is 17 ... d5 18 Qd1 Na4 19 Rxa4 Bxa4 20 Qxd5 Bc6 with the better game for Black.

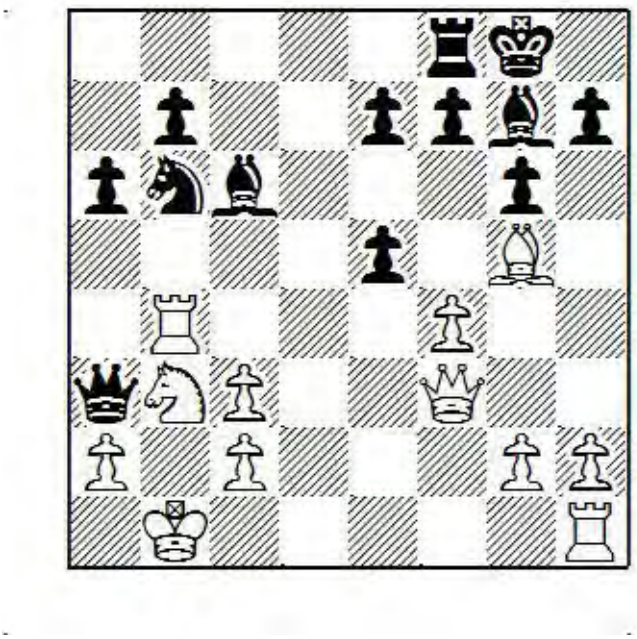
18 Rb4??

White returns the favour!

Answer: The pawn capture is actually a dreadful move as White could have reached a winning position by simply recapturing the pawn with 18 fxe5 Bc6 19 Qg3 e6 (19 ... Na4 20 Bc1 traps the queen) 20 Rb4 and White wins at least a piece, possibly even the queen, if Black is not careful. In other words, White is winning.

18 ... Bc6!

Black continues to improve his position by creating threats. The alternative 18 ... Na4 19 Rxa4 Qxa4 wins back the exchange, but the game continuation is better.



19 Qxc6?

This is obviously a very desperate move, albeit a rather premature one. A better option, although still very good for Black is 19 Qg3 Nd5 20 fxe5 Nxb4 21 cxb4 Qxb4 22 Re1 Rd8 when Black has the extra pawn and the compensation: well-coordinated pieces, bishop pair, better pawn structure and safer king. In other words, Black's position is rather easily won for a player like Gashimov.

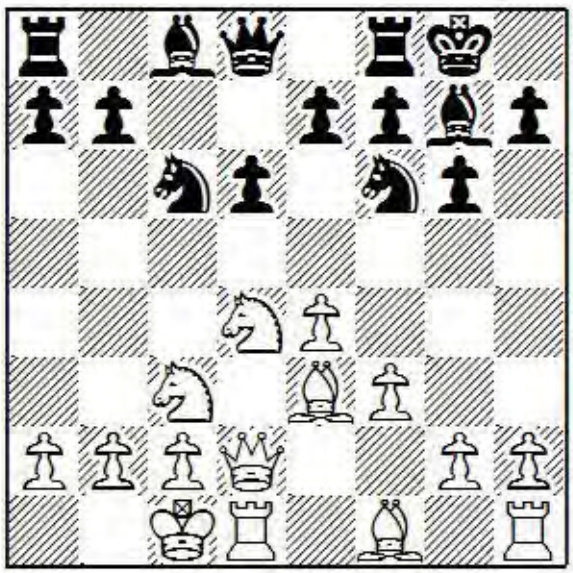
19 ... bxc6 20 Rxb6 exf4 21 Bxf4 Bxc3

Since this is a blitz game, we will not criticise White for playing on. As long as there is life, there is hope. But in reality, the game is over, and Gashimov makes no mistakes in executing his material advantage and securing the win.

22 Bc1 Qa4 23 Rd1 a5 24 Rd7 Qe4 25 g3 a4 26 Nc5 Qf5 27 Be3 Re8 28 Rd3 Bg7 29 Nxa4 Qf1+ 30 Bc1 Bh6 31 Rd8 Qxc1 mate 0-1

Chapter Five
Yugoslav Attack without Bc4: 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0



This is the first of three chapters on this line, which is undoubtedly one of the most critical lines against the entire Dragon Variation. White eschews Bc4 and instead castles queenside right away, allowing Black the typical ... d6-d5 break that we have already acquainted ourselves with in the chapters on the Classical Dragon. The lines that we will be looking at in this chapter, those with 10 exd5, are typically quite sharp, involving many pawn and exchange sacrifices from Black, several of which are mandatory if Black has to generate adequate counterplay. If you have to play the Dragon with confidence, it is important that you gain a good understanding of the lines and games in this chapter, because you are likely to run into them regularly, especially against players who are up on their theory.

We open our coverage with something of a softball move on White's part: 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Bh6 which looks reasonably logical, but as we see in Game 24, Black is doing rather well.

A much more principled option is when White, instead of Bh6, chooses to capture the d-pawn with 13 Qxd5. This line is quite important for Black to meet well. In Game 25, Black plays 13 ... Qc7! to which White picks up the rooks with 14 Qa8 Bf5 15 Qxf8+. Black is doing fine in this line, although winning this position is another struggle altogether. The more critical option for White is 14 Qc5, which we examine in the following two main games. In Game 26, after 14 ... Qb7, we see White opt for 15 b3, whereas in Game 27, we examine 15 Qa3.

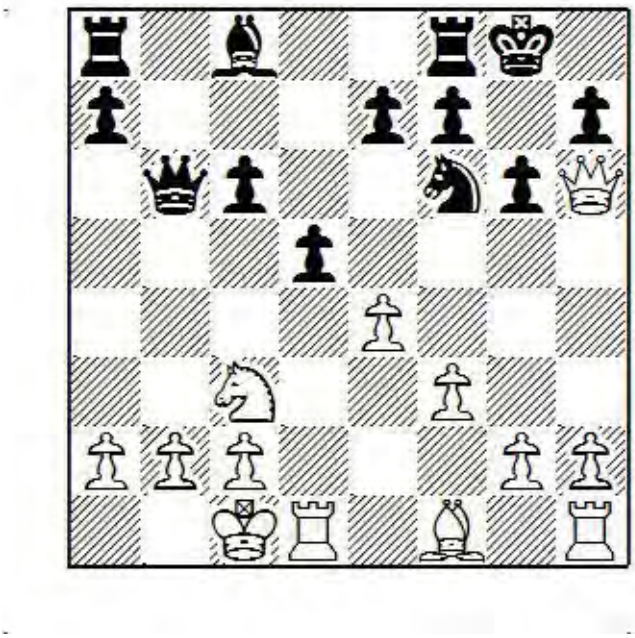
From there, we move on to the more popular main lines. In Game 28 we look at 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4 Nxc3, while 12 ... Bxd4 is discussed in Game 29 between two top American grandmasters.

In Games 30 and 31, we enter the 'real' main line after 12 ... e5 13 Bc5, which has been the topic of discussion for many years. In the former, Black decides to sidestep White's threat to win the exchange with 13 ... Re8, whereas the latter game has Black welcoming White to capture the exchange on f8 with 13 ... Be6 14 Ne4 and then again with 14 ... Rb8. Finally in Game 32, Black tries the less provocative 14 ... Re8, which is also considered the main line.

Game 24
M.Kuijf-G.Rechlis
Beersheba 1987

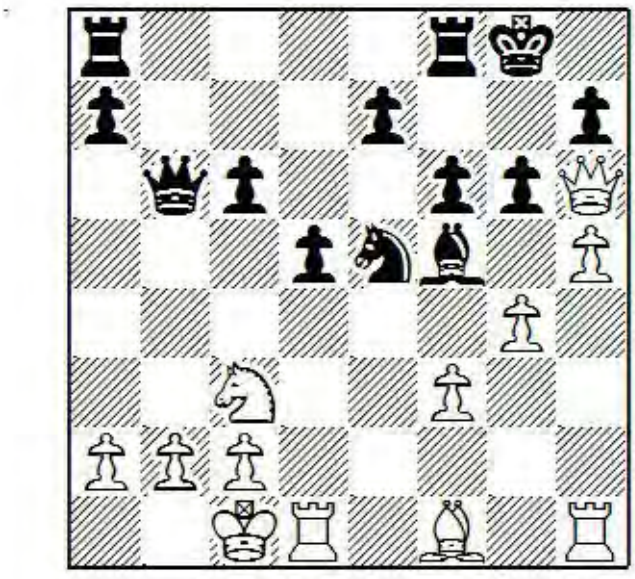
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5

White has a few alternatives available here. The more important ones, 10 Qe1 and 10 Kb1, will be dealt with in the next chapter. Another move, which has been played regularly and not with bad results and often by quite strong players, is 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Bh6 (11 exd5 Nxd5 takes us to the main lines) and here, Black should reply 11 ... Bxh6 12 Qxh6 Qb6!



Black doesn't hesitate a second and gets his counterplay along the open b-file going immediately:

a) 13 e5 Nd7 14 h4 Nxe5 15 h5 Bf5 16 g4 (16 hxg6 Bxg6 is pleasant for Black as White's attack will have a hard time finding a footing with Black's light-squared bishop now actively taking part in both defence and attack) and now Black slips in a clever premeditated tactic with 16 ... f6!



17 Qf4 (the point behind Black's previous move is that 17 gxf5 is met by 17 ... g5, and the queen is trapped as ... Nf7 follows) 17 ... Rab8 18 b3 g5!? (another fascinating idea, the white queen may get trapped on f5 as well though 18 ... Bd7! is quite possibly a bit stronger after 19 hxg6 hxg6 20 g5 Qf2 21

Be2 Bf5 22 gxf6 exf6 23 Qh6 Kf7 and the king is heads for safety on e6 and Black has the better chances) 19 Qxf5 Qe3+ 20 Kb2 Rf7! (this was the point behind Black's 18th move and Black sets up the threat of 21 ... e6 22.Qxe6 Nc4+, winning the queen) 21 Bd3 (White finds a narrow escape) 21 ... e6 22 Rhe1 (the only sensible way to save the queen) 22 ... Qxe1 23 Qxh7+ Rxh7 24 Bxh7+ Kxh7 25 Rxe1 Rb4 with a complicated endgame, where Black should be better due to his pawn mass in the centre and the weak f3-pawn, V.Rogovski-M.Golubev, Ordzhonikidze 2001.

b) An interesting alternative is 13 h4 Rb8 14 b3 Qc5 15 Kb2 dxe4 16 h5 which has been played before, but here Black can improve over our existing knowledge with 16 ... exf3! 17 hxg6 fxg6 18 gxf3 Bf5 with an interesting position where both sides have chances.

10 ... Nxd5 11 Nxc6

The other central trade with 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 Nxc6 Qxc6 does not present Black any problems:

a) 13 Qb4 Bf5 14 Bd3 Qe6 15 Bd4 Bxd3 16 Rxd3 Qxa2, and Black is a pawn up without a shadow of compensation for White, E.Dolukhanova-G.Jones, Warsaw 2010.

b) 13 Bh6 Be6 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 obviously doesn't cause Black any headaches.

11 ... bxc6 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Bh6

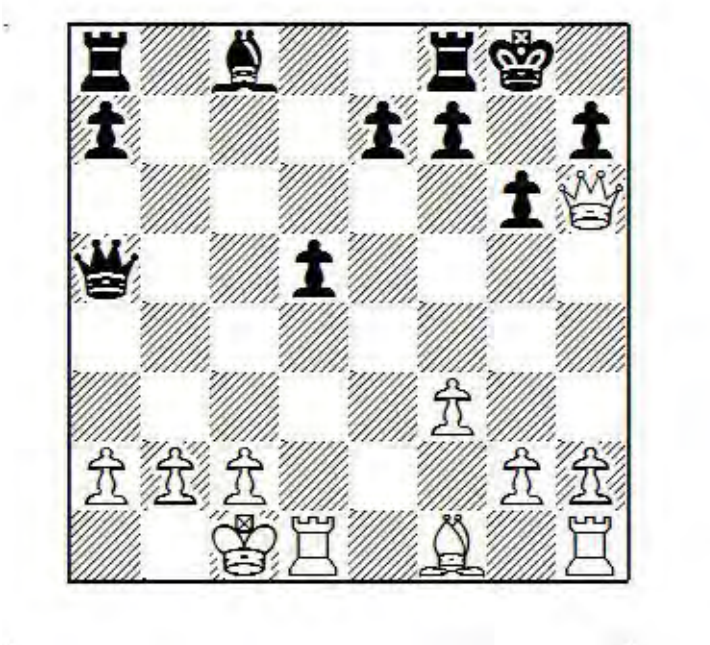
The take-everything-in-sight line 13 Qxd5 Qc7 14 Qxa8 is covered in our next main game.

13 ... Bxh6 14 Qxh6

Question: I am not sure I understand, why does Black want to invite the White queen to h6?

Answer: This is actually a theme which you are going to become very familiar with throughout this book. Often, the white queen will be somewhat out of play on h6 and unable to assist in defending his own king. Moreover, dragging the queen to the h6-square allows Black to place his queen actively with a tempo gain.

14 ... Qa5



The alternative 14 ... Rb8!? is also not bad, for instance after 15 h4 Bf5 16 Bd3 Qb6 (16 ... Bxd3 has also been played and also leads to approximately even chances) 17 b3 Qf6 18 Kb1 e6 19 h5 Rb7 and the chances are split down the middle, A.Kuzmin-S.Tiviakov, Belgrade 1989.

15 Kb1 e5

Once again, 15 ... Rb8 is playable with 16 h4 Bf5 (16 ... e5 would transpose into our main game) 17 Bd3 Qa3 (17 ... Qc3 18 b3 e6 19 Bxf5 gxf5 leads to a fascinating heavy piece only ending (or middlegame without minor pieces) when it is not easy to determine who is better as both sides have some king safety issues) 18 b3 Bxd3 19 Rxd3 Rfc8 20 Qd2 e6 giving mutual chances though I would probably

prefer Black while the computer favours White slightly, M.Panarin-E.Can, Voronezh 2007.

16 h4 Rb8 17 h5?!

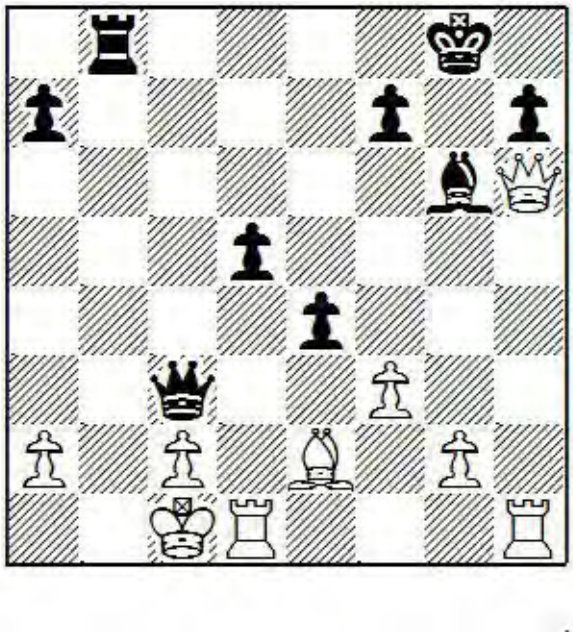
Question: It looks like White is about to open the h-file, isn't this dangerous for Black?

Answer: No, in fact White's last move immediately causes him problems as Black's pieces are already prepared to do bad things to the white king.

White has also tried 17 Bd3!? e4 18 fxe4 Qb4 (18 ... Bg4 can lead to a draw rather quickly after 19 Rdf1 Rxb2+ 20 Kxb2 Qb4+ 21 Kc1 dxe4 22 Qf4 Qa3+ 23 Kd2 Qb4+) 19 b3 dxe4 20 Be2 Qc5 21 h5 g5 22 Rhf1 (22 Rd6!? is much better and after 22 ... Be6 23 Qf6 Rfc8 24 Rxe6 fxe6 25 Qxe6+ Kh8 26 Qxe4, White should definitely not lose) 22 ... Rb6 23 Rf6 Be6 and White is in trouble, B.Podlesnik-M.Justin, Yugoslavia 1989.

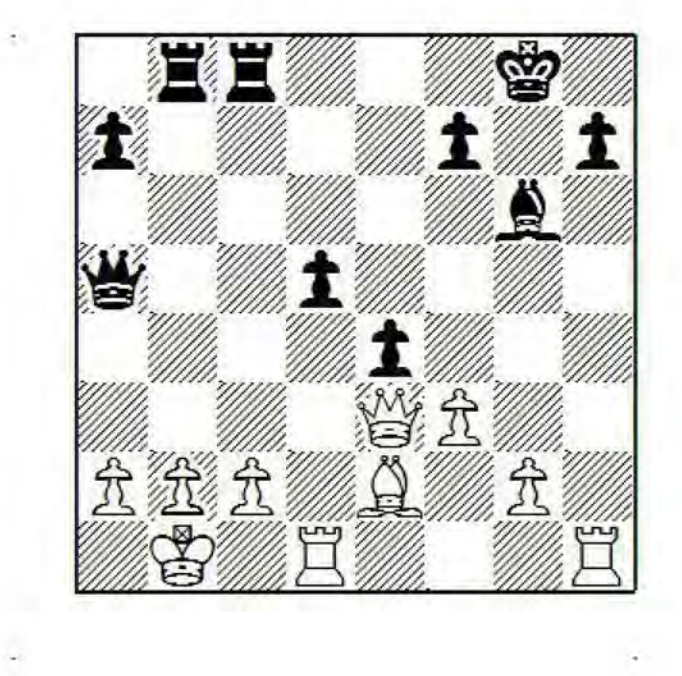
17 ... Bf5 18 Bd3 e4 19 hxg6 Bxg6 20 Be2 Rfc8

This looks decidedly simpler than the computer's solution as it offers the following solution to the problem: 20 ... Rxb2+! 21 Kxb2 Rb8+ 22 Kc1 Qc3.



Black only has a pawn for the rook but the attack is simply irresistible. After 23 fxe4 dxe4 24 Qf4 Rc8 25 Bc4 Qxc4 26 Kd2 e3+ 27 Qxe3 Qc6 (or 27 ... Rd8+ 28 Ke1 Rxd1+ 29 Kxd1 Qxc2+ 30 Ke1 Qb1+ 31 Kf2 Qxh1 and Black is also winning here) 28 Rh3 Rd8+ 29 Ke1 Re8, Black has a decisive material advantage.

21 Qe3



Exercise: So Black has gotten his big guns trained on the white king's abode. How can he make further inroads?

Answer: Black further accelerates his already dangerous attack by nudging the queen off the third rank.

21 ... Rc3!

Note that 21 ... exf3?! is met adequately with 22 Bd3 and Black has no breakthrough.

22 Qd4??

A very significant error by White, though it mercifully ends his suffering considerably sooner. The better move is 22 Qf4 but it soon gets ugly anyway after 22 ... Qb6 23 Qc1 e3 24 Rd3 Rbc8 25 Rxc3 Rxc3 26 Bd1 and now Black just picks up material with 26 ... e2 27 Bxe2 Rxc2 28 Qxc2 Bxc2+ 29 Kxc2 Qg6+ which should win for Black without too many issues.

22 ... Qa3

The degree to which this is game over is evidenced by the fact that the computer offers 23 Qxc3, losing a queen, as White's best move.

23 b3 Rxc2 24 Kxc2 Qxa2+ 25 Qb2 e3+ 26 Kc1

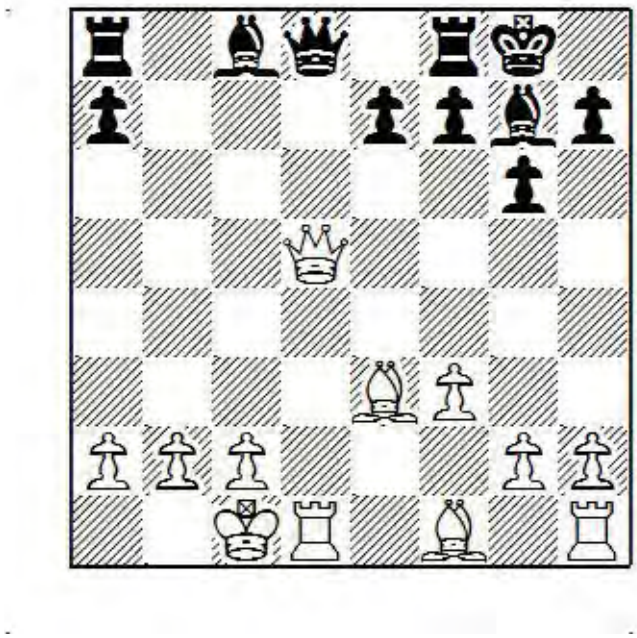
Obviously 26 Kc3 is not any better on account of 26 ... Rc8+ with mate soon to follow.

26 ... Rc8+ 27 Bc4 Rxc4+ 0-1

Mate follows in two moves.

Game 25
N.Grigore-M.Golubev
Bucharest 2003

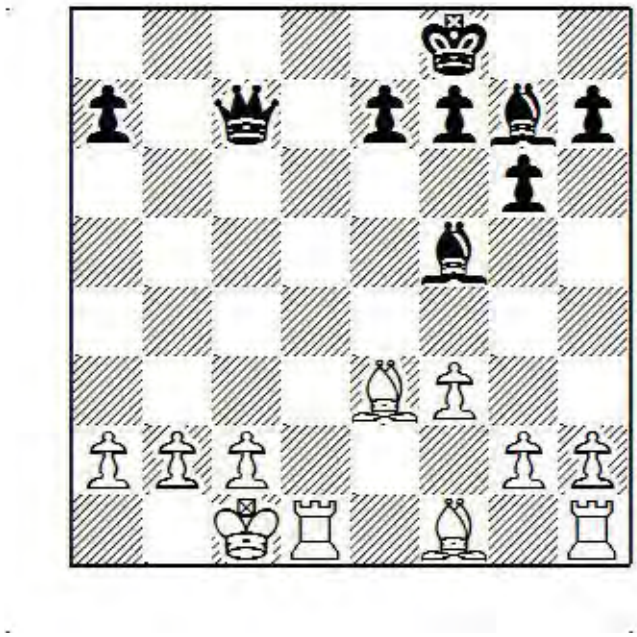
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 exd5 Nxd5 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Qxd5



Question: I meant to ask this question when we looked at the previous game. Has White not just won a pawn and it seems like he is forcing the exchange of the queens as well?

Answer: Yes, he has won a pawn. That is the cost of doing business for Black in this variation. However, as compensation Black receives a lot of open files and diagonals along with easy development of his pieces. With regards to that exchange of queens, no, that is not forced ...

13 ... Qc7! 14 Qxa8 Bf5 15 Qxf8+ Kxf8



Question: So White has gained two rooks and a pawn for the queen. That seems like a mighty good deal, does it?

Answer: You are absolutely right, if we were only counting points, it would be. But here White is well behind in development and Black has completed his, which means that Black has full compensation for the small investment he has made.

16 Rd2

Surprising often White has managed to get himself in trouble fast by playing 16 Bd3 here. Black deals with it by issuing a simple double threat with 16 ... Qe5 17 Kd2 (17 c3?? is of course worse and after 17 ... Qxe3+ 18 Kc2 Qe2+ 19 Rd2 Bxd3+ 20 Kc1 Bh6, White resigned in F.Khrapatin-M.Golubev, Internet (blitz) 2004) 17 ... Bxd3 18 Kxd3 Qxb2 19 Bxa7 f5 (note that 19 ... Qa3+ does not win a piece since after

20 Ke2, Black cannot capture the bishop on account of his own back rank) 20 Be3 f4 21 Bd2 Qd4+ 22 Ke2 Qc4+ 23 Ke1 Qe6+ 24 Kf1 Qxa2 and while the game is far from over, White's pieces are terribly coordinated.

16 ... Be6

Black has to play ... h7-h5 at some point.

In our main game, Golubev, a major Dragon expert, decides first to provoke another pawn weakness on the queenside before playing the restraining move. There are several examples of Black playing it right away, deciding to keep the bishop on f5, apparently the more active square. With 16 ... h5 17 Be2, and now:

a) 17 ... Bf6, White has a few choices:

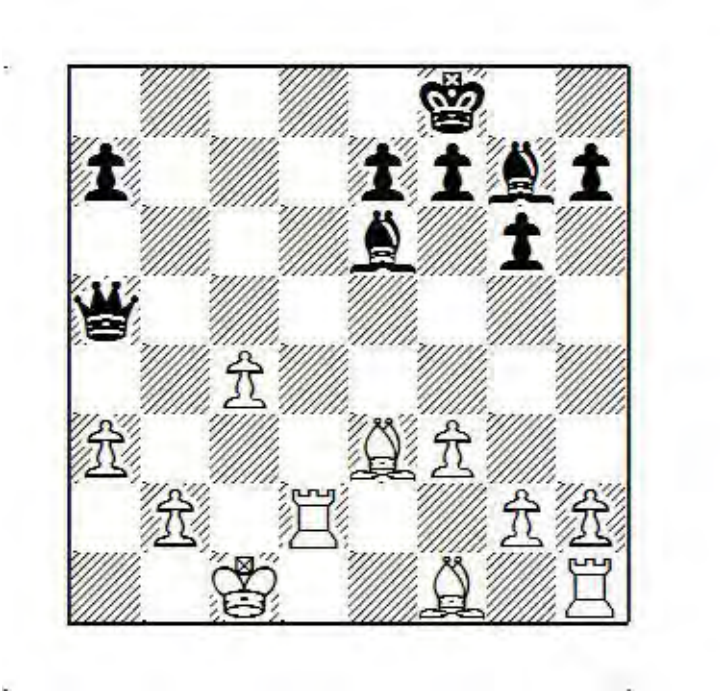
a1) 18 g3?! Qb7! 19 c4 Qa6 20 a3 Qa4, and White is beginning to have real problems keeping the many holes in his position covered, E.Kislik-S.Husari, Budapest 2010.

a2) 18 Kb1 Qe5 19 Bd4 Qf4 20 Rhd1 Bxd4 21 Rxd4 Qxh2 22 Bf1 h4 and while Black has the initiative, there is nothing decisive.

a3) 18 Rhd1!? Qxh2 19 Bc4 Qc7 20 Bb3 h4 and White has managed to coordinate his pieces and is not really worse off, but it is also hard to see where any potential winning chances should come from.

b) 17 ... Qb8!? 18 b3 Bc3 19 Rd5 Qb4 20 Bc5 Qf4+ 21 Kb1 Be6 22 Rd8+ Kg7 23 Bxe7 Qc7 24 Rd3 Bf5 25 Bd6 Qc6 26 Ba3? (weirdly desperate as 26 Rhd1!? is relatively best with 26 ... Bd4 27 Ba3 (obviously not 27 Rxd4?? Qxc2+ 28 Ka1 Qc3 mate) 27 ... Bf6 28 Bb2 Bxb2 29 Kxb2 Bxd3 30 Bxd3 Qd6 31 h3 Qd4+ 32 Kb1 a5 reaching an ending that either side would need help from their counterpart to win) 26 ... Bxd3 27 Bxd3 h4 28 h3 Bf6 and while there is still work left to be done, Black has chances in this endgame, N.Grigore-V.Jianu Bucharest 2005.

17 c4 Qa5 18 a3

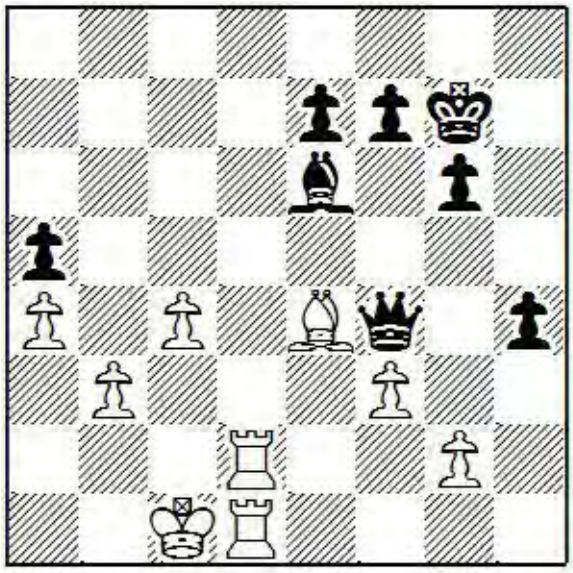


White has to walk the fine line of keeping everything covered and not making any unnecessary weaknesses. Over the next few moves, he manages quite well while Black has his pieces on their best squares to continue applying pressure.

18 ... h5 19 Be2 Kg8 20 Rhd1 Qe5 21 Bd4 Qxh2 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Bd3

Though the h2-pawn has been snared, a pair of bishops have been exchanged and there are no longer any immediate threats against the king, so White is in decent shape. The next step for Black is to start pushing the kingside pawns forward to put White under pressure to defend correctly.

23 ... Qf4 24 b3 a5 25 a4 h4 26 Be4?!

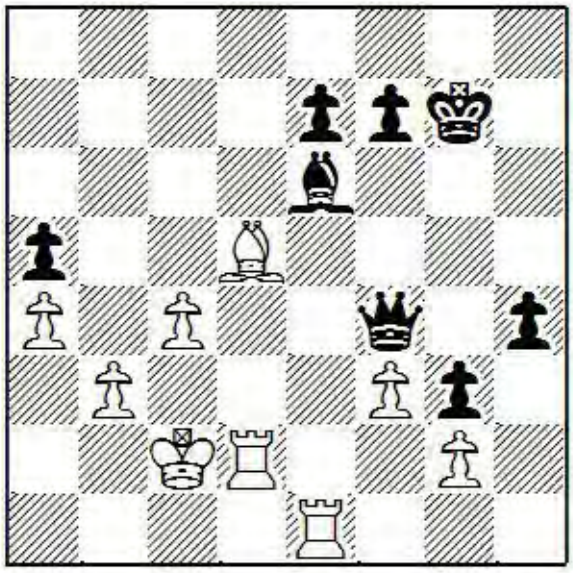


It is easy to think that this is a better square for the white bishop than d3, but from e4, it is basically shut off from the defence against Black's kingside pawn advances. Simply waiting with 26 Rf1 would have been a better strategy.

26 ... g5 27 Re1?

White gets quite careless at this point, making his defensive task potentially much more difficult. The correct defence would be to play 27 Rh1!, preventing Black from playing ... g5-g4 directly due to the hanging h-pawn. Now Black's kingside advance will be considerably more complicated. For instance, after27 ... Qg3 (27 ... f5 28 Bd5 Bxd5 29 cxd5 Qe5 leaves Black with the better chances, but how much better is a good question) 28 Kc2 g4 29 Ba8 gxf3 30 gxf3 h3 31 Rhh2, while Black is definitely better with the the h-pawn certainly a major thorn in White's side, this is far from easily won because the white rooks are connected and at present keeping the second rank guarded very nicely.

27 ... g4 28 Kc2 g3 29 Bd5!?



This is not a bad idea, challenging Black to make an extremely important decision on whether to keep the bishops on the board or to exchange them. The alternatives do not look promising for White. Both 29 Rde2 h3 30 gxh3 Bxh3 31 Rg1 Kf8 32 Rd2 e6 or 29 Rg1 Qe3 30 Rdd1 Kf6 31 Bd3 Qf2+ 32 Kc3 h3 33

gxh3 Bxh3 look similar in their outcome as White has an uncomfortable position, attempting to defend against a far advanced black g-pawn without any chance of real counterplay.

29 ... Bxd5?

The exchange of bishops seems like a good decision because it seems difficult for White to defend himself against the passed pawn Black is about to create on the kingside. However, the opposite turns out to be the case. Black needs the bishop to support his action on the kingside as well as to create threats against White's king when the time comes. One of the key issues for White is that his bishop has a real hard time getting back to defend against the passed pawn that will emerge on the g-file, because the f-pawn is in the way. Furthermore, White cannot rid himself of the f-pawn because then Black gets an additional two passed pawns. For that reason, Black should have avoided the exchange of bishops and instead opt for 29 ... Bf5+! 30 Be4 h3 31 gxh3 (31 Bxf5? is even worse as after 31 ... Qxf5+ 32 Kb2 h2 intending amongst others ... Qf5-c5-g1, White cannot keep both the back rank and the g2 – pawn guarded at the same time) 31 ... Bxh3 32 Rg1 Kf6 33 Rd3 g2 34 Rd2 Qh2 35 Rdd1 Qg3, and while far from easily won for Black, White has a long defence ahead of him.

30 Rxd5 h3

Black can also try 30 ... e6 31 Rd3 (31 Rh5? doesn't help White as he both loses time and the ability to coordinate the rooks to efficiently defend against Black's action on the kingside after 31 ... Kg6 32 Rhe5 h3) 31 ... h3 32 gxh3 Qh4 33 Rg1 Qxh3 34 Rd2 Qf5+ 35 Rd3 and Black cannot make any progress as 35 ... Qh3 is answered with 36 Rd2 and the g-pawn gets no further.

31 Re4 hxg2 32 Rxf4 g1Q 33 Rg4+ ½-½

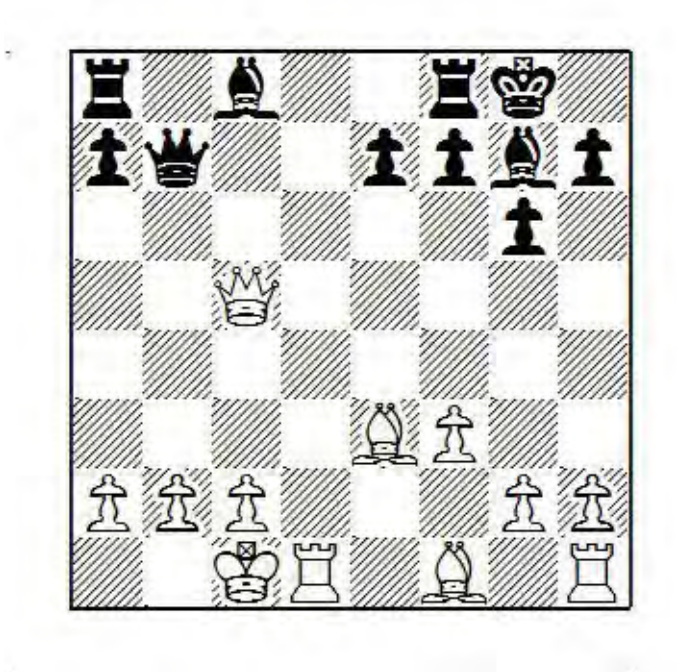
Here a draw was agreed because Black's king cannot avoid the perpetual checks from White's rooks.

Game 26
D.Kokarev-P.Carlsson
Oropesa del Mar 2000

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Nc3 cxd4 5 Nxd4 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 d5! 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Qxd5 Qc7 14 Qc5

14 Qxa8 was discussed in the previous game.

14 ... Qb7



15 b3!?

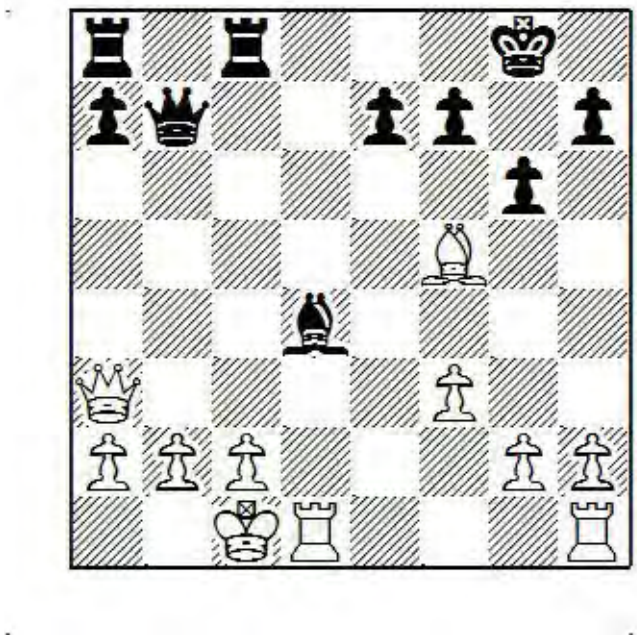
White decides that this is the most effective way to stop the threats against the b2-pawn. But there are several other options at this juncture:

Question: Should Black be concerned about 15 Qb5?, aiming to exchange queens and perhaps offering a draw by repetition?

Answer: No, absolutely not! The queen trade is the least of Black's concerns as his initiative will persist even as the pressure on White's queenside remains.

a) After 15 ... Qxb5 16 Bxb5 Rb8 17 Bc4 Bxb2+ 18 Kd2 a5, Black had won the pawn back with a superior pawn structure and the much safer king. In L.Kritz-A.Shabalov, Port Erin 2005, White didn't last very long following 19 Bh6 Re8 20 c3 Bd7 21 Kc2 Bf5+ 22 Bd3 Rec8 23 Bd2 Bd7 24 Bf4 Rxc3+ 25 Kd2 Rb4 26 Be3 Be6 27 Ke2 Rc8 28 Bb1 Bc3 and White resigned.

b) With 15 Bd4, White wants to avoid weakening the pawn structure around the king and hopes to exchange Black's scary-looking g7-bishop. If this plan works, it would indeed be ideal, but as you may have suspected already, things are rarely that simple. Now 15 ... Bf5! develops another piece that points towards White's king's abode, connects the rooks and threatens to put a rook on c8 with devastating consequences. Following 16 Bd3 (neither 16 Bxg7?! Rfc8 (when White has to give up his queen with better chances for Black) nor 16 Qb5 Qc7 17 Qc5 Qf4+ 18 Be3 Qa4 19 Qc4 Qa5 20 c3 Bxc3! are viable options) 16 ... Rfc8 17 Qa3 Bxd4 (17 ... Bxd3 18 Rxd3 e5 is favoured by my silicon friend, and indeed after 19 Bc3 e4 20 fxe4 Qxe4 21 Rhd1 Qxg2 Black, is doing rather well) 18 Bxf5, Black has a devastating retort.



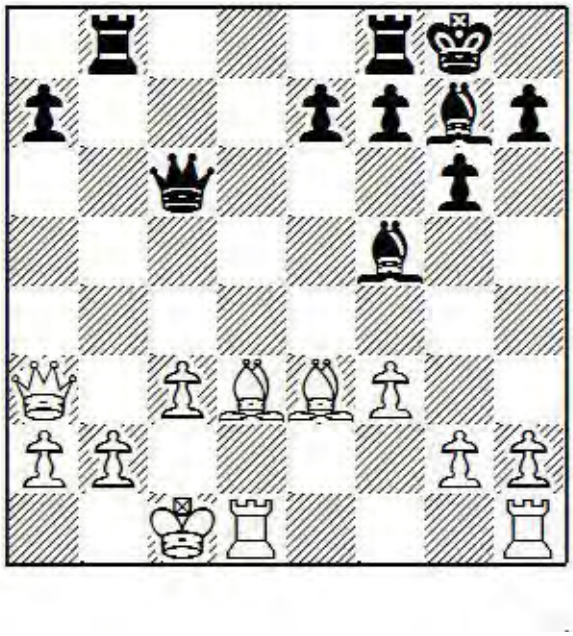
Exercise: What is Black's strongest move? Should he play try to regain his pawn and play for double rook ending?

Answer: Black does best to sustain his attack with a timely zwischenzug**.**

18 ... Rc3! (the boring alternative 18 ... Qxb2+ 19 Qxb2 Bxb2+ 20 Kxb2 gxf5 doesn't leave either side with any winning chances) 19 Be4 (alternatively 19 bxc3 Be3+ 20 Rd2 Rb8 isn't pretty, but White may be able to survive after 21 Kd1 Bxd2 22 Kxd2 Qd5+ 23 Ke3 Qxf5 though obviously, Black has all the chances to win the game) 19 ... Qb6, and now White collapsed completely with 20 bxc3? (as *Houdini* points out, White can play 20 Qa4! after which Black has full compensation for the pawn and a pleasant game following 20 ... Be3+ 21 Kb1 Rb8 22 b3 Rc7 when the dark squares gives Black a lot of play against the white king) 20 ... Be3+ 21 Rd2 Rd8 (Chris Ward offers the pretty line 21 ... Rb8 22 Kd1 Bxd2 23 Kxd2 Qf2+ 24 Kd3 Rd8+ 25 Kc4 Qe2+ 26 Bd3 Qe6+ 27 Kb4 Rb8+ 28 Ka4 Qc6+ 29 Ka5 a6! (threatening ... Rb5+) 30 c4 Qc7+ 31 Ka4 a5! 32 c3 Qc6+ 33 Kxa5 Qa8 mate!) 22 Bd3 Rb8 23 Kd1 Bxd2 24 Qb3 Qd6 25 Kxd2 Qf4+ 26 Ke2 Qe5+ 27 Kf2 Rxb3 28 axb3 Qc5+ 29 Ke2 Qxc3 and Black eventually

won the endgame, N.Ninov-J.Geller, Nancy 2014.

c) 15 c3 certainly seems to make some sense: White stops the b2-threat without giving the dark squares away and one would think that the light squares are less of a concern. But as we have seen above, the c3-pawn is not immune to capture, even if guarded by a pawn. In D.Vocaturo-G.Jones, Hastings 2013, the game continued with 15 ... Bf5 16 Qa3 (16 Qb5 Qc7 17 Qc4 Qe5 18 Bf4!? Qf6 and although White has an extra pawn, Black has full compensation) 16 ... Rab8 17 Ba6 (note that 17 Bd3 runs into 17 ... Bxc3!) 17 ... Qc6 18 Bd3.



Here, Gawain Jones forgot to play a continuation that he himself had recommended on *Chesspublishing.com*. He should have pressed on with 18 ... Qd7! 19 Bxf5?! (19 Qa6!? is better but Black has no issues after 19 ... Rfc8 20 Be4 Qc7 21 Rd3 Bxe4 22 fxe4 and here Black can force a draw with 22 ... Rxb2!? 23 Kxb2 Bxc3+ 24 Ka3 Rb8 25 Ka4 Rb4+ 26 Ka3 Rb8) 19 ... Qxf5 20 Qxe7? (20 Rhf1 keeps Black's initiative at more manageable levels) 20 ... Bxc3! 21 bxc3 Qb1+ 22 Kd2 Qb2+ 23 Kd3 (23 Ke1 Rfe8 24 Qxa7 Qxg2 25 Rf1 Rb2, and mate is guaranteed) 23 ... Rfe8 24 Qxa7 Rbd8+ 25 Kc4 Qe2+ 26 Kb3 Rb8+ 27 Bb6 Qb5+ 28 Kc2 Rxb6 and it is game over for White.

d) 15 Qa3 is White's most popular option and is covered in our next main game.

15 ... Bf5 16 Bd3 Rac8 17 Qa5

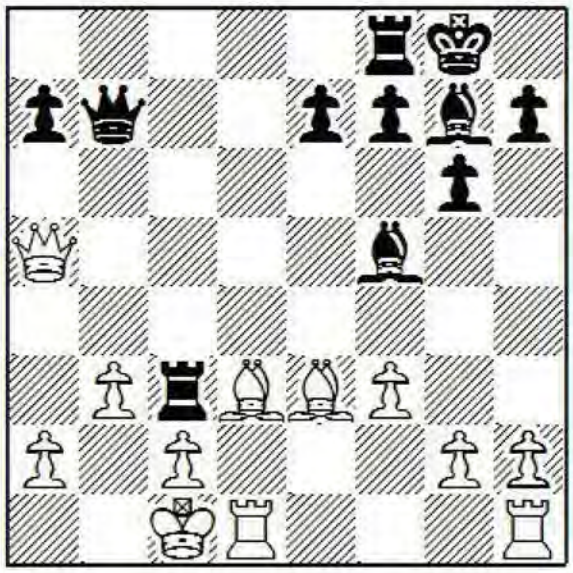
This appears to be the only move that holds the balance for White. The alternatives are considerable more fun for Black:

a) 17 Qxa7?! Qd5! 18 Kb1 Rxc2! 19 Kxc2 Ra8 (19 ... Rc8+!? 20 Kd2 Bxd3 21 Ke1 h5 is a fascinating alternative when 22 Qa6 Rc1 23 Qxd3 Qxd3 24 Bxc1 Qc2 gives Black better chances) 20 Qxa8+ Qxa8 21 Bxf5 Qxa2+ 22 Kd3 gxf5 leaves Black better in the endgame according to Ward.

b) 17 Qa3? Qc7!? 18 Bxf5 Qc3 19 Bxc8 Qxe3+ 20 Rd2 Bc3 (Ward) 21 Kb1 Qxd2 22 Ba6 Bd4 and White will have to jump some ugly hoops to prevent being mated.

17 ... Rc3!

Once again, the rook plonks itself on this square!



Question: What is the purpose of this move? Is the rook not just getting in the way of Black's other pieces?

Answer: This is a multipurpose move where Black:

1) Puts pressure on the d3-bishop and indirectly, the e3-bishop as well.

2) Plans to stack all the heavy pieces on the c-file to create an irresistible battery against the c2-pawn.

3) Encourages White to try hitting the rook with 18 Bd4 Bxd4 19 Bxf5 Rc5! when Black gets an enduring initiative after 20 Be4 Qc8!.

18 Bxf5

White didn't last very long after the blunder 18 Rhe1? when 18 ... Bxd3 19 Rxd3 Rxd3 20 cxd3 Rc8+ terminates the game in A.Teterikov-N.Rozkov, Nizhnij Novgorod 2009.

18 ... Rxe3 19 Be4

No better is 19 Bd3 Re5 20 Qd2 Rc5 with another unpleasant position for White with the threat of ... Bc3 and ... Qb6-a5.

19 ... Qb8 20 g3 Qc8 21 g4 Qb8

This dancing around with the queen pushes White to do something about the prospect of a dark-squared invasion.

22 Qg5?!

The counter-intuitive looking 22 Kb1 may be the better move according to *Houdini* when after 22 ... Qf4 (intending ... Qf6) 23 Rd8 Bc3 24 Rxf8+ Kxf8 25 Qxa7 Re2 (25 ... Qxh2!? 26 Qxe3 Qxh1+ 27 Qc1 Qh2 is another option) 26 a4 Qxh2 27 Rf1 Qd6, I would definitely prefer Black as those dark-squared worries are not going away.

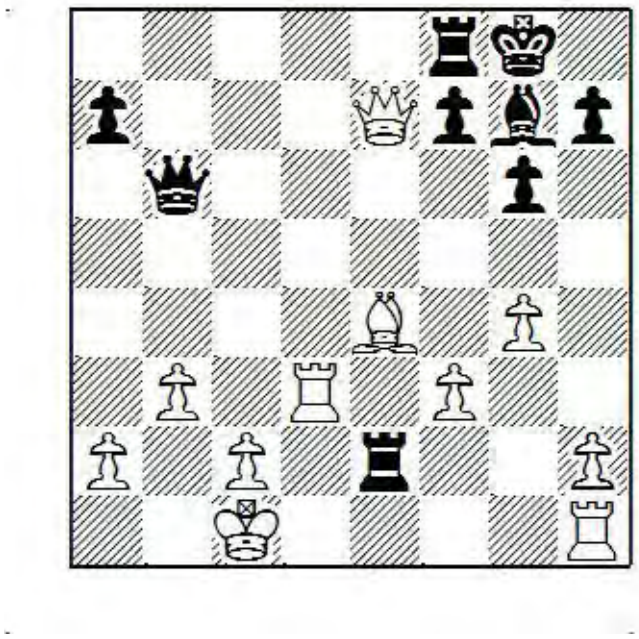
22 ... Qb6 23 Qxe7

White is playing with fire. Maybe 23 Rhe1 to exchange Black's pesky e3-rook would have provided a position with fewer worries after 23 ... Rxe1 24 Rxe1 Bf6 25 Qd2 Qc5 and Black has ample compensation for the pawn.

23 ... Re2!

Making room for the queen to join in the attack on the dark squares.

24 Rd3



Exercise: How can Black most effectively create threats against White's king?

24 ... Rc8?!

This method of pressing on the c2-pawn actually costs Black time in pressing his attack. In order to keep it, he needs to touch base with White's back rank to build more forceful threats.

Answer: The direct 24 ... Qf2! is very problematic for White. It not only presses the c2-pawn immediately, it also helps Black keep control of the dark-squares. After 25 Qc7 (25 Rdd1?? obviously doesn't work as 25 ... Qe3+ 26 Kb1 Qc3 leads to mate) 25 ... Re1+ 26 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 27 Rd1 Bh6+ 28 g5 Bxg5+ 29 f4 Qe3+ 30 Kb1 Bxf4 31 Qc6 Bxh2, all four white kingside pawns get bagged and Black still has the initiative and is obviously doing rather well.

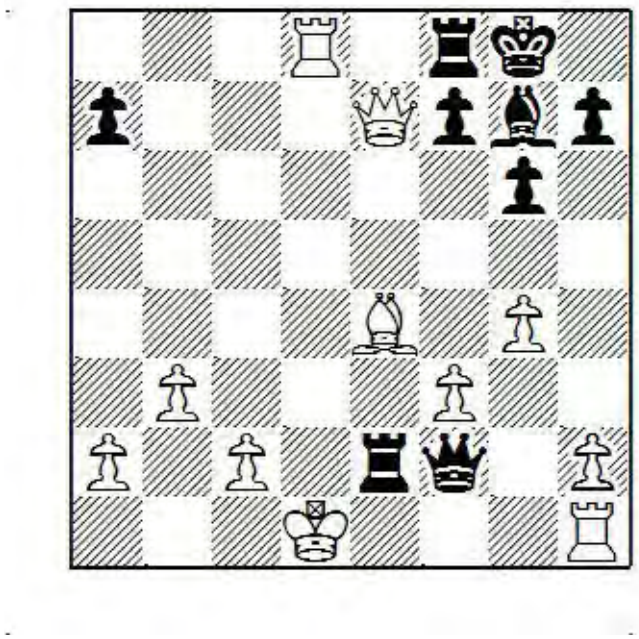
25 Rd7

White has to play actively in order to supress Black somewhat, otherwise Black will be left with too much time to build up a decisive attack.

25 ... Qe3+ 26 Kd1

Most definitely not 26 Kb1? Re1+ 27 Rd1 Qc3 and mate is unstoppable.

26 ... Rf8 27 Rd3 Qf2 28 Rd8?!



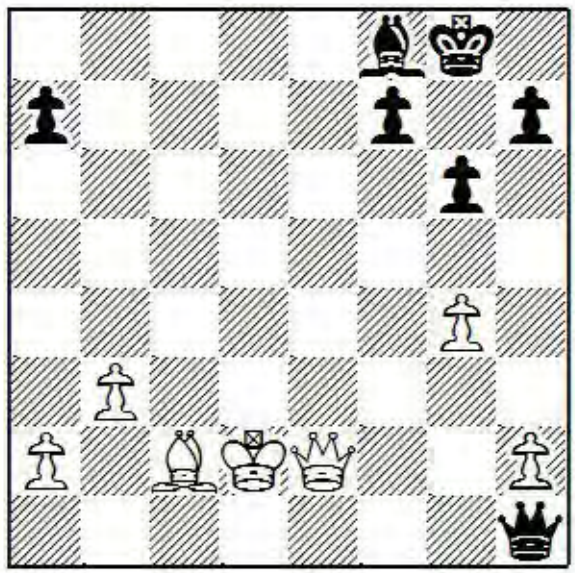
Exercise (combination alert): White seems exposed, but appears to have all weaknesses covered. How should Black proceed?

Note that 28 Qc7 can lead to a draw after 28 ... Bh6 29 Qc3 Bg7 30 Qc7 Bh6 31 Qc3 if Black wants to continue to repeat moves, however, Black can keep the game going with 31 ... Qg2 32 Re1 Rxe1+ 33 Qxe1 Rc8 34 c4 Qxh2 with excellent compensation for the pawn.

28 ... Rxc2!

Answer: Aha! A cool deflection tactic. The bishop is removed from the protection of the f3-pawn and all of a sudden the h1-rook is loose.

29 Bxc2 Qxf3+ 30 Kd2 Qxh1 31 Rxf8+ Bxf8 32 Qe2



32 ... Bb4+?!

Here 32 ... Bh6+! 33 Kc3 Qa1+ 34 Kb4 Qxa2 wins a pawn at no risk.

33 Ke3 Bc5+ 34 Kd2 Bb4+

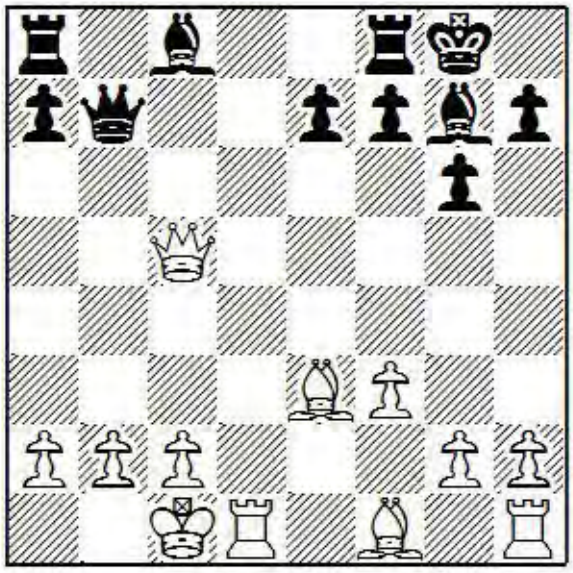
Instead, 34 ... Qa1 35 Qc4 Qe5 is still very pleasant for Black. The safer king and the opposite-coloured bishops play in his favour.

35 Ke3 ½-½

Black can still torture White for quite a while more since the latter's king is out in the open. However a draw was agreed here.

Game 27
T.Luther-R.Polzin
Austrian League 2009

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Qxd5 Qc7 14 Qc5 Qb7

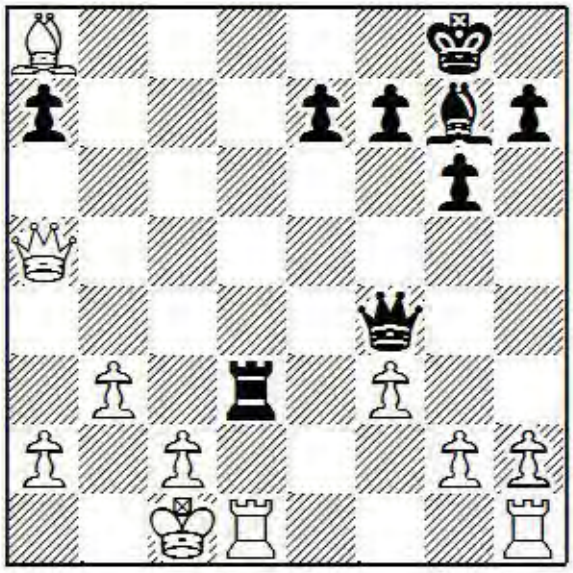


Black is naturally not interested in exchanging queens. He starts to create weaknesses in the white king's pawn cover.

The alternative 14 ... Qb8 looks somewhat more elegant than 14 ... Qb7 in our main game, but is probably not as good. But let's take a look at a couple of options for White:

a) 15 b3 and now we branch off again:

a1) 15 ... Bf5 16 Bd3 Rc8 17 Qa5 (the greedy 17 Qxe7? is met by 17 ... Re8 18 Qg5 Qe5 19 Bxf5 Qb2+ 20 Kd2 h6 21 Qf4 gxf5 22 Ke2 Bc3! and White loses material after 23 Rhe1 Qxc2+ 24 Kf1 Bxe1 25 Rxe1 Re6 with excellent winning chances for Black) 17 ... Rc3 18 Bxf5 Rxe3 19 Be4 Qf4 20 Bxa8 was V.Ivanchuk-J.Hodgson, Amsterdam 1996 (instead, 20 g3 Qf6 21 Rd8+ Rxd8 22 Qxd8+ Bf8 23 Kb1 Qc3 24 g4 Re2 gives Black sufficient compensation for the pawn – analysis by Rogozenco) and now Black should play 20 ... Rd3+!.



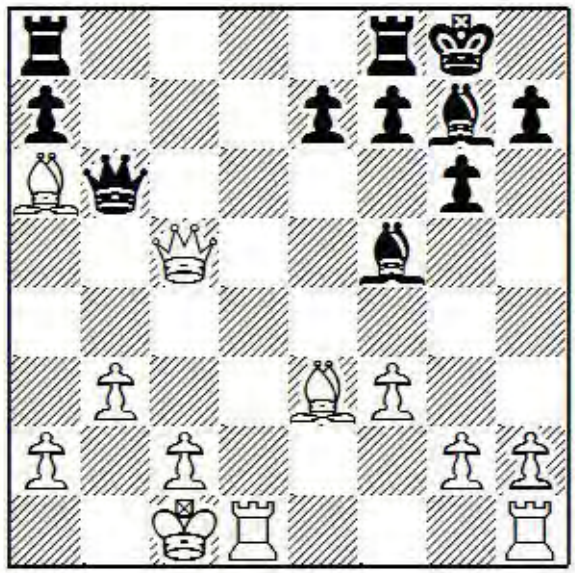
This would have offered Black a good game following 21 Kb1 (also 21 Rd2 Bc3 22 Qxc3 Rxc3 23 Be4 a5 24 a4 Rc7 leaves White a very uncomfortable, but perhaps not lost, defensive task ahead) 21 ... Qd4 when 22 Qd8+ (not 22 c3? Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 Qxd1+ 24 Kb2 Qd2+ 25 Ka3 Bxc3 and Black has very good chances) 22 ... Qxd8 23 Rxd3 Qxa8 24 Rhd1 Qb7 25 Rd8+ Bf8 26 Re8 Qb5 27 Rdd8 Qf1+ 28 Kb2

Qxg2 29 Rxf8+ Kg7 30 Rg8+ Kf6 31 h4 Qxf3 is a complex endgame which may be better for Black, but honestly, it is hard to truly assess. However, I like Black's prospects better than White's.

a2) After 15 ... a5!?:

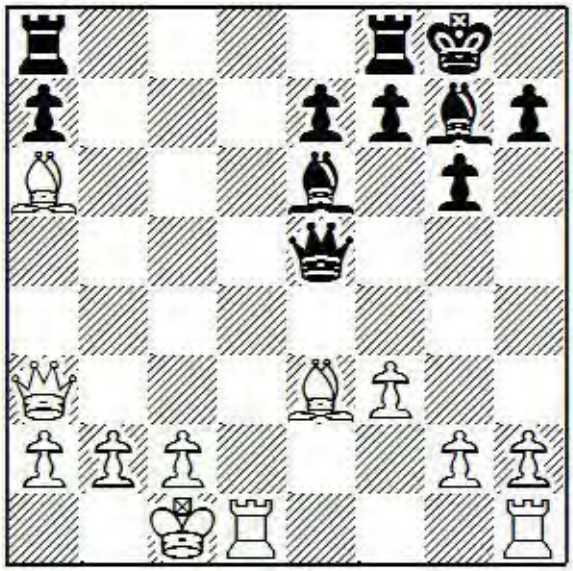
a21) White might choose the greedy 16 Qxe7 (though 16 Qb6 Qe5 17 Bd4 Qf4+ 18 Be3 Qe5 leads to an instant draw by repetition as suggested by Sapi and Schneider) 16 ... Be6 17 Qd6 Qe8 18 Qb6 (18 Bf4 Rc8 is fine for Black) 18 ... a4 19 Bb5 Qe7 20 Qc5 Qxc5 21 Bxc5 Rfc8 22 b4 Bxa2 23 Rd3 a3 24 c4 Bf8 25 Kd2 Bxc5 26 bxc5 Rxc5 27 Rc3 Rd8+ 28 Kc2 Rdc8 29 Ra1 with a long and reasonably forced line, ending in a drawn endgame.

a22) Now after 16 Ba6 Qb6, we reach a position that is similar to the above variation following 12 Nd5 cxd5 13 Qxd5 Qc7 14 Qc5 Qb7 15 Qa3 Bf5 16 Ba6 Qc7 17 Qc5 Qb6, which is about even.

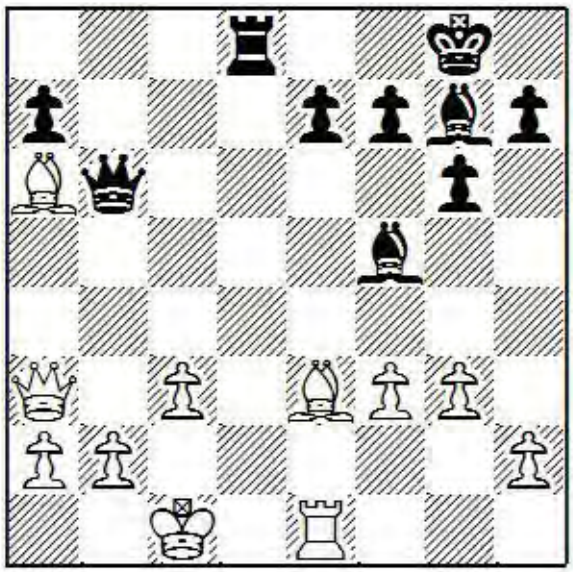


But in our present line, the pawn is on b3 which is an important detail that White realised a little too late in T.Cross-A.Stein, Los Angeles 1991 as after 17 Qxb6? (17 Bd3 Qf6! is somewhat better for Black but 17 Bc4! holds the balance after 17 ... Qf6 18 Qd4 Qc6 19 Qd5 Qf6 20 Qd4 Qc6 with a repetition) 17 ... axb6 18 Bd3 Rxa2 19 Bxf5?? (19 Kd2 Bxd3 20 Kxd3 Rd8+ 21 Kc4 Rxc2+ 22 Kb5 is also better for Black, but least the white king escapes mate) 19 ... Bc3! and White resigned.

b) 15 Qa3 Be6 16 Ba6 and now Black has 16 ... Qe5!? (a square not available in the 14 ... Qb7 line). Whether the move is actually the best is another question, since 16 ... Qc7 17 c3 Rfb8 is a decent option for Black.



17 g3 (perhaps better is 17 Bd4!? Qg5+ 18 Qe3 Qxg2 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Qe5+ Kg8 21 Qg3 Qxg3 22 hxg3 with a slight White edge) 17 ... Rad8 18 Bf4 Qf6 19 Rhe1 Bf5 20 Rxd8 Rxd8 21 c3? (better is 21 Bc4 and after 21 ... Qb6!?, the e7-pawn is taboo as 22 Rxe7 walks into 22 ... Qg1 mate) 21 ... Qb6! 22 Be3

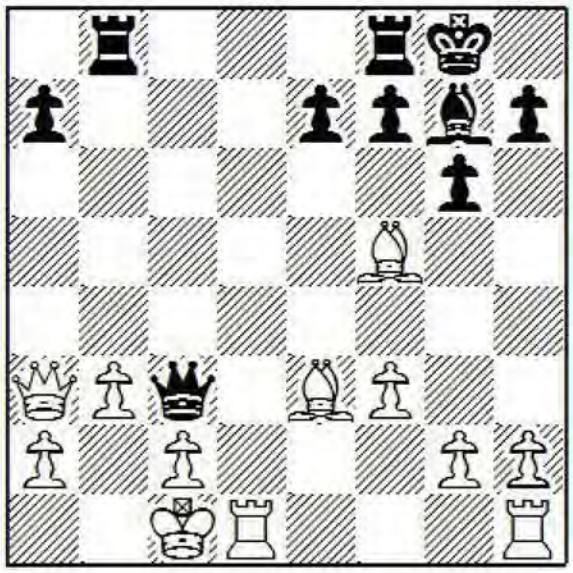


Exercise (tactical): What is Black's best move?

22 ... Bh6!

Answer: A very elegant cross-pin. In order to survive, White is now forced to weaken the light squares further. White continued 23 f4 (23 Bxh6?? Qf2 and White gets mated) 23 ... Qc6 24 Bd2 Qd5 (my computer actual prefers the patient 24 ... e6!? intending ... Qg2 and following 25 b4 Qg2 26 Qb2 Qxh2 27 Be3 Qxg3 28 Qf2 Qxf2 29 Bxf2 Bxf4+, Black is winning) 25 Re2 e5 26 Qa4 exf4 (the more accurate 26 ... Qh1+! forces 27 Re1 Qxh2 28 Re2 Qh1+ 29 Re1 Qd5 30 Re2 exf4 31 Re8+ Rxe8 32 Qxe8+ Kg7 33 Bxf4 Bxf4+ 34 gxf4 Qxa2 35 Qe5+ Kh6 with an endgame that Black should win) 27 gxf4? (this loses outright and rather quickly and better though still unpleasant is 27 Re8+ Rxe8 28 Qxe8+ Bf8 29 Bxf4 Bd7 30 Qe2 Qxa2 31 Bc4 Qa1+ 32 Kc2 Bf5+ 33 Bd3 Be6 with a difficult defence ahead for White) 27 ... Bxf4! 28 Re8+ (28 Bxf4? Qh1+ ends the game) 28 ... Kg7 29 Qxf4 Rxe8 30 Bc4 Qh1+ 31 Bf1 Kg8 and being unable to prevent both ... Bd3 and ... Bh3, White resigned in M.Adams-A.Fedorov, Wijk aan Zee 2001.

15 Qa3 Bf5 16 Bd3 Rab8 17 b3 Qc6!



The queen switches files with the idea of setting up a long diagonal battery via the f6- or c3-squares.

Also playable is 17 ... Rfc8 18 Bxf5 gxf5 19 Rd3 Qc6 20 c4 Qg6 21 Rhd1!? (21 Rd2 runs into 21 ... Rxc4+! 22 bxc4 f4 23 Bb6 Qxb6 with an ongoing initiative for Black) 21 ... Qxg2 22 Kb1 Kh8 23 Bxa7 Ra8 24 R3d2 Qxf3 25 Qxe7 Re8 26 Qxf7 Qe4+ with a very complicated position, M.Vachier-Lagrave-R.Mamedov, Heraklio 2004. White has a couple of extra pawns though his king is a lot more exposed, thus giving Black plenty of compensation.

18 Bxf5?!

This is not the best, but not yet clearly wrong. Many other moves have been analysed at this juncture:

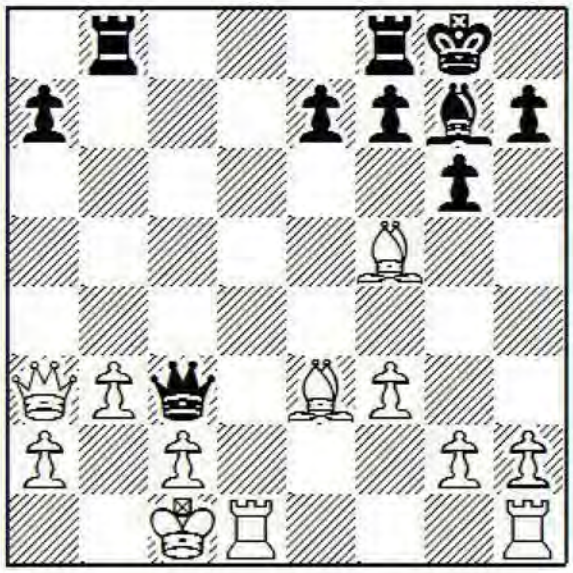
a) 18 Qxe7? Qc3 19 Bxf5 gxf5 20 Qc5 Qb2+ 21 Kd2 Rbc8 and White is lost.

b) 18 Qc5 Qf6 19 Bxf5 Qb2+ 20 Kd2 gxf5 21 Ke2 Rbc8 22 Qxf5 e6 23 Qd3 Rc3 24 Qd7 Rxc2+ 25 Rd2 Qxa2 leaves Black with the initiative though winning chances seem slim.

b) 18 c4 Qf6 19 Bxf5 Qc3+ 20 Kb1 Qxe3 is dreadful for White and after 18 Bc4 Qf6 19 Kd2 Bxc2 20 Rc1 Bf5 21 Ke2 (Vigorito assesses this position as equal but White's position is quite uncomfortable) 21 ... a5 22 Rhe1 a4 23 Kf1 Qh4 24 Kg1 Be5 25 f4 Bd6 26 Qb2 e6 and Black holds an ongoing initiative.

c) 18 Qa5 Qf6 19 Bxf5 Qb2+ 20 Kd2 gxf5 21 Ke2 Rfc8 22 Rc1 Rxc2+ 23 Rxc2 Qxc2+ 24 Qd2 Qc7 25 Bf4 e5 26 Rc1 was M.Florea-P.Walczak, correspondence 2008, and now 26 ... Qe7 is relatively best with about even chances.

18 ... Qc3!



According to Rogozenco, this cool piece sacrifice is an idea of Ukrainian GM Mihail Golubev, who played it in an internet blitz game.

19 Bd3?

This is a common mistake that gets White in serious trouble. White should return the piece with 19 Qc5 Qb2+ 20 Kd2 gxf5:

a) 21 Ke2 Rfc8 (21 ... Rbc8!? is also worth a try) 22 Qxf5 Rxc2+ 23 Rd2 Rxd2+ 24 Bxd2 Qxa2 25 Rc1! Qa6+ (25 ... e6 26 Qc2 Qa3 27 Qd3 Qb2 is equal) 26 Rc4 Rd8 27 Be3 e6 28 Qc2 Qd6 29 Rc8 Qa6+ and a draw was agreed in F.Handke-R.Polzin, Bundesliga 2001.

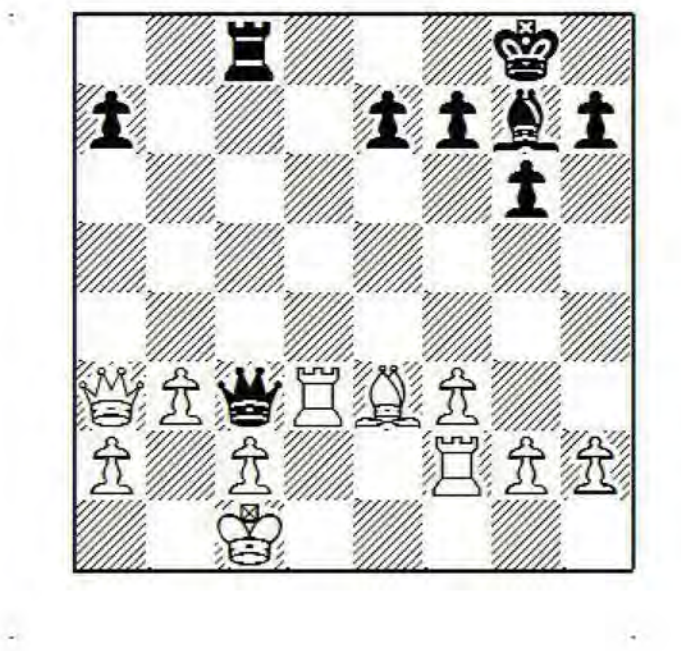
b) 21 Qxf5 e6 22 Qe4 f5 (22 ... Rbc8 23 Ke2 Rxc2+ 24 Rd2 Rxd2+ 25 Bxd2 Rd8 26 Qe3 Rd5 27 f4 Qxa2 is defendable, but uncomfortable for White) 23 Qf4 (White cannot afford to open the e-file by taking on e6 with 23 Qxe6+? Kh8 24 Rhe1 f4 and Black is winning) 23 ... Rbc8 24 Ke2 e5 25 Qg5 Rxc2+ 26 Rd2 Qxa2 27 Rhd1 Qxb3 28 Bxa7 f4 29 Bf2 Qc4+ 30 Ke1 Qb4, and while Black certainly has the initiative, there is no clear path to gain a clear advantage.

c) 21 ... Qxa2 22 Ke2 Rxb3 23 Bd4 Qa6+ 24 Kf2 Rb5 25 Qg4 e5 26 Be3 Rb2 27 Qf5 Qc8 was K. Orambolim-M.Golubev, Internet (blitz) 2001 when Black is better.

19 ... Rbc8 20 Rhf1?

Now White is just losing. The better move 20 Qa4 is ugly, but doesn't lose immediately after 20 ... Rfd8 21 b4 Rxd3 22 Rxd3 Qa1+ 23 Kd2 Qxh1 24 Qxa7 Qxg2+ 25 Bf2 e5 and Black is obviously better.

20 ... Rfd8 21 Rf2 Rxd3 22 Rxd3



Exercise: What is Black's strongest move?

22 ... Qe1+??

There's something odd about the fact that both White, a strong grandmaster, and Black, a strong international master, blundered dramatically in a short game ending with a perpetual check. This makes me consider whether this was all staged, but the ultra-sharp and tension-filled nature of the Dragon does produce such games and thus, personally it is unfair for me to judge.

Answer: Black at this point misses a win with 22 ... Qxd3! and now White has to figure what to do about the bishop and it turns out that nothing works. After 23 Qxe7 (neither 23 Qxa7 Qc3 24 Kd1 Qa1+ 25 Ke2 Rxc2+ 26 Bd2 Bc3 27 Kd3 Qd1 nor 23 Bc5 Qc3 24 Qb4 Qa1+ 25 Kd2 Rd8+ saves White either) 23 ... Bf8 24 Qxa7 Ba3+ 25 Qxa3 Qxe3+ 26 Rd2 Rd8 27 Qb4 Qe1+ 28 Kb2 Rxd2, Black should win.

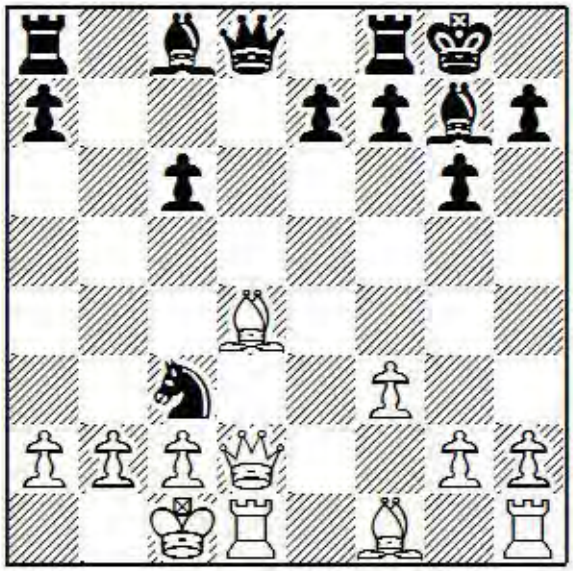
23 Rd1 Qxe3+ 24 Rfd2 Rxc2+

Forcing the draw.

25 Kxc2 Qc3+ 26 Kb1 Qa1+ 27 Kc2 Qc3+ 28 Kb1 Qa1+ 29 Kc2 ½-½

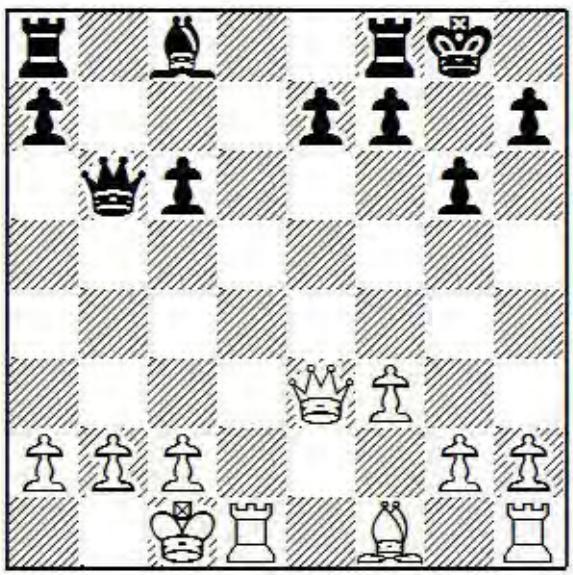
Game 28
R.Castellanos Rodriguez-M.Perez Candelario
Spanish Championships, Linares 2013

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4 Nxc3



This move was originally introduced in a Danish game between G.Iskov and K.Bjerring in 1974, but it received little attention until Boris Alterman re-introduced the move in 1990 and attached a couple of exclamation points along with his concept. While Alterman's excitement over a new discovery is understandable, this variation is kind of boring for a Dragon game. To me, this variation is about Black playing for a draw through pulling the excitement out of the game and then hoping there is not enough left to play for a win.

13 Qxc3 Bh6+ 14 Be3 Bxe3+ 15 Qxe3 Qb6!?



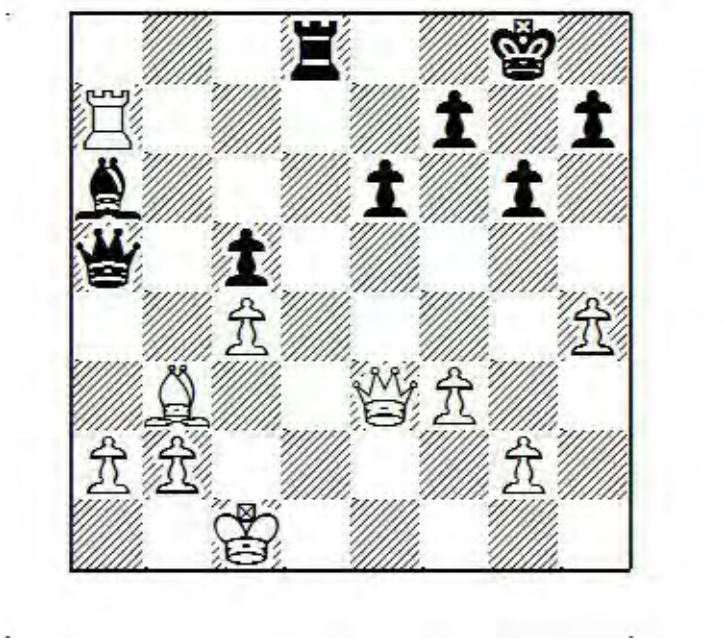
This was Alterman's new idea.

Question: Do you think this looks like a pretty boring way for Black to play?

Answer: It is only boring if White exchanges queens here when Black has fully equalised. White is of course not forced to do that as he can pick up the e7-pawn after which Black's move is in fact a gambit.

Bjerring had played 15 ... Qa5 16 Bc4 Ba6 17 Bb3 (it appears that 17 Bxa6 is leads to nothing special after 17 ... Qxa6 18 Kb1 e6 19 h4 Qb6 20 Qg5 Rad8 21 h5 Rd5 22 Rxd5 cxd5 23 hxg6 fxg6, and White is no more than fractionally better, B.Predojevic-R.Mamedov, Chalkidiki 2003) 17 ... e6 18 Rd7 (18 Rd6

c5?! was played in V.Isupov-A.Maksimenko, Vladivostok 1995, where White lost astonishingly fast after a series of very poor moves, but 19 Qe1! Qxe1+ 20 Rxe1 Bb7 21 Rd7 would have been clearly better for White) 18 ... Rfd8 19 Rhd1 Rxd7 20 Rxd7 Rd8 21 Rxa7 Qb5 22 c4 Qa5 in G.Iskov-K.Bjerring, Vejle 1974 and now White should have continued with 23 h4!, starting an attack against Black's rather weak king as well as getting ready for something not immediately apparent after 23 ... c5 (23 ... h5 24 g4 hxg4 25 fxg4 is dreadful for Black)



Exercise: What is White's strongest move?

Answer: 24 Qc3! takes advantage of the fact that Black's bishop is miserably poor and is lacking useful squares. After 24 ... Qxc3+ 25 bxc3 Bc8 26 Rc7 Kg7 27 Rxc5, Black has very little offer in terms of resistance.

16 Qxe7

This is the critical test of Black's idea. White takes the pawn, which will have to be given back later, and hopes that Black's pawn recovery will provide White with enough time to get a positional advantage.

The alternatives have shown less promise:

a) 16 Qxb6 axb6 17 a3 Be6 18 Bd3 Kg7 19 Rhe1 Rfd8 20 Be4 Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 Rc8 22 a4 f5 23 Bd3 Ra8 24 b3 Kf6 and although White is fractionally better with a pawn majority on the queenside, the Russian grandmaster held this position without too much difficulty, E.Bacrot-A.Grischuk, Baku 2008.

b) 16 Qc3 Be6 and now:

b1) 17 Bc4 Bxc4 18 Qxc4 Rad8 19 h4 Qe3+ 20 Kb1 Qf2 21 Qxc6 was B.Socko-S.Azarov, Ostrava 2009 and now 21 ... Qxg2 was relatively best with about even chances.

b2) 17 h4 Rfd8 18 Bd3 Qe3+ (18 ... Rab8 is also possible with 19 h5 Qe3+ 20 Kb1 Qd4 21 Qxd4 Rxd4 22 Be4 seen in P.Almagro Llanas-F.Sanchez Saez, Oropesa del Mar 2001 and after 22 ... Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 c5, Black isn't any worse) 19 Kb1 c5! 20 h5 Qd4 21 hxg6 hxg6 22 Qe1 (22 Qxd4 Rxd4 is completely harmless) 22 ... a5 23 Be2 (Rogozenco also mentions 23 Be4 Qxd1+ 24 Qxd1 Rxd1+ 25 Rxd1 Rb8 26 Rd3 Kg7 27 Ra3 f5 28 Bd3 Ra8 29 Rc3 Rc8, and White has very little) 23 ... Qe5 24 Qh4 Rdb8 25 Qh7+ Kf8 26 Qh8+ Qxh8 27 Rxh8+ Kg7 28 Rxb8 Rxb8 and although Black has some weaknesses to deal with, White will have a hard time doing anything about them, I.Kurnosov-S.Solovjov, St Petersburg 2004.

b3) 17 a3 Rfd8 18 Rxd8+ Rxd8 19 Bd3 Qe3+ and a draw was agreed in C.Jepson-P.Jirovsky, Aalborg 1991 although Black is quite possibly holding the initiative at this stage.

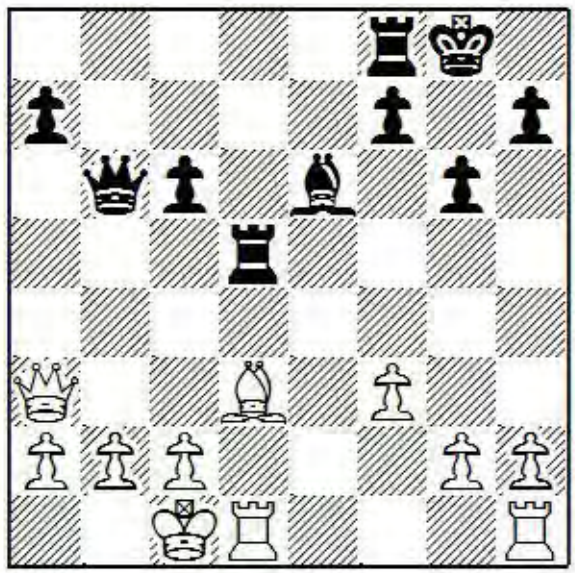
b4) 17 Kb1 Qf2 (17 ... Rad8 18 Bd3 c5 is also fine for Black) 18 h4 Rad8 19 Bd3 Qxg2 20 Rdf1, M.Bosiocic-J.Chirila, Budva 2009, and now 20 ... Rd6 21 h5 Qg5 22 hxg6 fxg6 is better for Black.

16 ... Be6 17 Qa3 Rad8

In an early outing, 17 ... Rfd8 was played by a future FIDE World Champion against a previous World Champion, and then it seems like not many have really bothered with this move without it ever being

refuted. After 18 Ba6 (18 Be2?! is met with the clever 18 ... Bxa2!) 18 ... c5 (18 ... Qf2!? seems pretty good too and the elite go-to-move now is 19 Bb7 Rab8 20 Bxc6 as in S.Sjugirov-S.Solovjov, St Petersburg 2009 and now 20 ... Bf5! 21 Be4 Bxe4 22 fxe4 Qxg2 leaves Black absolutely fine) 19 Be2 c4 20 f4 Rd4 (Black is basically fine after 20 ... Rac8 21 Rxd8+ Rxd8 22 Rd1 Rxd1+ 23 Bxd1 Qg1 24 Qg3 h5 25 h3 h4! and this is harmless for Black) 21 Rxd4 Qxd4 22 g3, White is perhaps a tiny bit better, but Black has decent compensation through his active pieces, G.Kasparov-V.Topalov, Amsterdam 1995.

18 Bd3 Rd5



19 Rhe1

White decides that the initiative is more important than hanging on to his a-pawn. But of course, White need not be so cavalier with his recently gained riches. Therefore a couple of other moves have been tried:

a) 19 Qc3 Rc5 20 Qd4 Rd8 (now Black shouldn't get tempted to play 20 ... Rxc2+??, thinking the loose queen on d4 will drop, but then 21 Bxc2 will get the queen guarded again and the cold shower begins) 21 Qf6 Rcd5 22 Rhe1 c5 23 Be4 Rxd1+ 24 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 25 Kxd1 Qd6+ 26 Ke1 Qxh2 and a draw is likely, J.Obregon Rivero-L.Perez Rodriguez, Havana 2010.

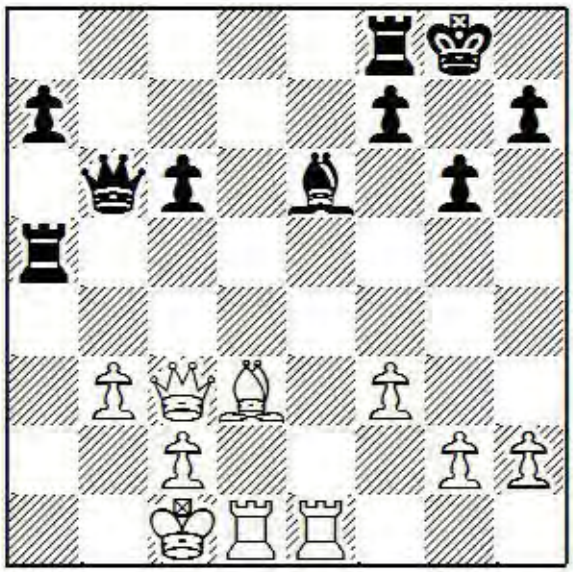
b) The solid 19 b3 prevents the pawn recovery but also weakens the dark squares enough for Black to get compensation after 19 ... Rfd8 20 Rde1 c5!? (also 20 ... Rd4 is fine as 21 Re5 R8d5 22 Re2 Qd8 23 Rhe1 a5 24 Re4 a4 25 Rxd4 Rxd4 leaves Black perfectly fine, Wang Hao-A.Timofeev, Ningbo 2010) 21 Bc4 (Rogozenco offers 21 h4 c4 22 Bxc4 Ra5 23 Rxe6 Rxa3 24 Rxb6 axb6 25 Kb2 Rda8 26 Ra1 Kg7 which according Rogozenco should be a draw, but it definitely White who has the upper hand of that draw) 21 ... Rd2 22 Bxe6 fxe6 23 Rd1 Rxd1+ 24 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 25 Kxd1 c4 26 Qe7 Qg1+ and a draw was agreed, S.Rublevsky-V.Gashimov, Poikovsky 2009.

19 ... Ra5

Recovering the pawn seems like the only sensible move, but nevertheless Black has tried 19 ... Rfd8 20 Qc3 c5 21 Bf1 (at first I thought 21 Re4 would promise White a better shot at an advantage, but it turns out that Black is actually going to be fine after 21 ... c4! 22 Rxc4 Rxd3 23 cxd3 Bxc4 24 dxc4 Rxd1+ 25 Kxd1 Qg1+ 26 Qe1 Qd4+ 27 Kc2 Qxc4+ 28 Kb1 Qd3+ 29 Ka1 Qc2 and Black's active queen compensates for the missing pawn) 21 ... Rd4 22 Rxd4 cxd4 23 Qa3 Qc7 which is perfectly fine for Black, S.Megaranto-Li Chao, Olongapo City 2010.

20 Qc3 Rxa2 21 b3 Ra5

Black has also tried offering the queen exchange with 21 ... Qa5, but the endgame isn't all that appealing: 22 Qxa5 Rxa5 23 Kb2 Rh5 24 h3 a5 25 c4!, and Black really has a depressing defensive task ahead, which wasn't made any easier by Black's next move ... 25 ... a4?! (25 ... Kg7 26 Kc3 Rc8 is relatively better, but ultimately still depressing) 26 b4! Rh4 27 Kc3 c5 28 b5 Rd4 29 Bf1, and Black is close to being outright lost, A.Filippov-M.Golubev, Manama 2009.



22 Kb2

I have a feeling that ideas involving the Rxe6 exchange sacrifice are probably the most dangerous for Black. Although there is no automatic win following the exchange sacrifice, it is not easy for Black to defend. Let's look at the alternatives to 22 Kb2:

a) White has done the exchange sacrifice immediately before with 22 Rxe6 fxe6 23 Bc4 Re8 (23 ... Rd5 is Black chickening out, but it leaves Black with a pretty terrible pawn structure after 24 Bxd5 cxd5 25 Re1 Qd6 26 Qe3 and while White isn't winning, Black really isn't in terrible shape though his position is uncomfortable, S.Sjugirov-R.Robson, Internet (blitz) 2008) 24 Kb2?! (24 Re1!? is better) 24 ... Qc7 25 Re1 Qg7! (White's attack is already out of steam) 26 Bxe6+ Kf8 27 Qxg7+ Kxg7 28 Re4 Kf6 and Black is already playing for a win, P.Carlsson-R.Winsnes, Sweden 2005.

b) White has also tried 22 Bc4 which really is quite harmless despite being played by a world-class player. Following 22 ... Bxc4 23 Qxc4 Rc5 (23 ... c5 is probably better) 24 Qd4 Qb5 25 Kb2 (25 h4 a5 26 g4 is a more dangerous option) 25 ... a5 26 Ra1 Rd5 27 Qf4 Rf5 28 Qe4 Rd8 29 Rad1, E.Alekseev-F.Caruana, Biel 2009, now 29 ... Rxd1 30 Rxd1 Qe5+ 31 Qxe5 Rxe5 should be a defendable endgame but it will require some work.

22 ... Rd5 23 Bc4

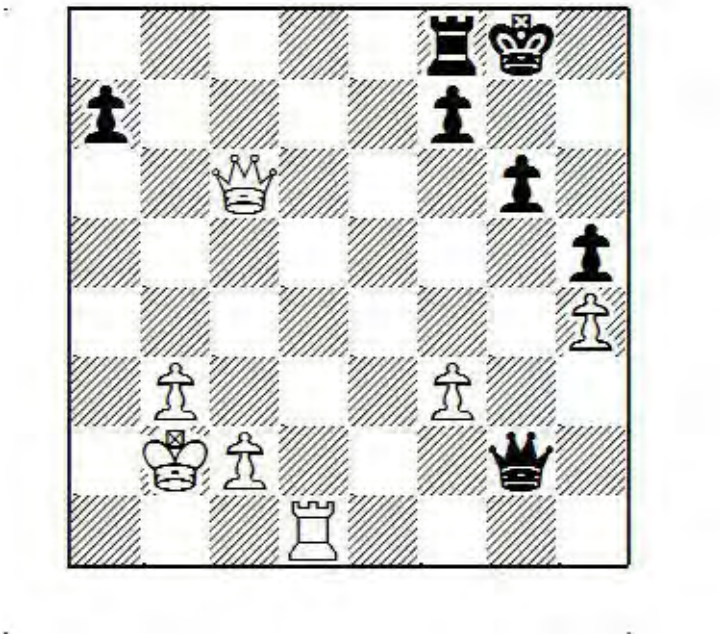
A more recent and relevant try is 23 h4!?, trying to attack the black king. After 23 ... Rfd8 24 Rxe6!? (White now fully commits to the attack by sacrificing the exchange, breaking up the pawn cover in front of Black's king) 24 ... fxe6 25 Bc4 Rd4 26 Re1, J.Duda-I.Beradze, Yerevan 2014, now Black should opted for 26 ... Re8 27 h5 Kg7 28 h6+ Kf8 29 Ra1 e5 and Black's position is holding up, but due to the many weaknesses (particularly around the king) Black cannot play for more than a draw.

23 ... Rxd1 24 Rxd1 Bxc4 25 Qxc4 Qf2 26 Qxc6

In a prior game, rather than aiming an uneven pawn distribution, White has tried piece domination with 26 Qg4 a5! (Black wants to break White's pawn cover, ensuring immediate counterplay) 27 h4 h5! 28 Qg5 a4! 29 Rd8 (time for White to pull the emergency brake before the situation on the queenside gets too uncomfortable) 29 ... axb3 30 Rxf8+ Kxf8 31 Kxb3 Qd4 and a draw was agreed in S.Fedorchuk-

A.Timofeev, Budva 2009.

26 ... Qxg2 27 h4 h5



There is no reason to allow White to push the pawn to h5.

28 Qf6 Rc8

This is essentially forcing White's perpetual check reply.

29 Rd8+ Rxd8 30 Qxd8+ Kg7 31 Qd4+ Kf8 32 Qd8+ Kg7 33 Qd4+ Kf8 ½-½

Game 29
G.Kamsky-H.Nakamura
Wijk aan Zee 2012

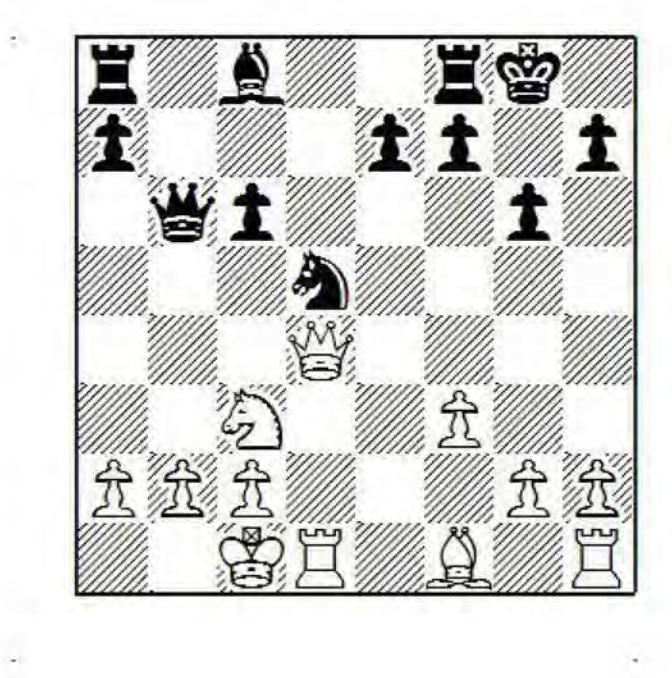
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4 Bxd4

This seemingly illogical exchange has become one of Black's more popular options over the last decade, particularly due to issues in the main lines that arise after 12 ... e5 13.Bc5.The weakness of the dark squares on the kingside along with eliminating one of Black's strongest attacking pieces appears to be exactly what White wants to accomplish. However, as we shall see, things are rarely that simple.

13 Qxd4

In *ChessBase Magazine*, Luke McShane makes some interesting observations, which are worth repeating: "White has a long-term structural advantage in this position, so Black has to be careful in his handling of it. Due to the weak Black queenside pawns, a queen exchange is normally in White's favour, and the advance h2-h4-h5 is another important theme. However, Black has his trumps as well. If White advances his pawns too fast on the kingside, a queen exchange may lead to a balanced endgame with mutual weaknesses. Another important source of counterplay lies on the queenside, where White's king is more vulnerable than it looks (and c1 is not always an ideal square)".

13 ... Qb6



Question: Why is Black so keen on getting the queens exchanged?

Answer: Considering the attacking options for White against the weakened Black kingside, this move makes a lot of sense. Furthermore, should White attempt to avoid the queen exchange, then the black queen will be ideally placed to wreak havoc against White's king along the open b-file. Finally, the immediate exchange on b6 will improve Black's pawn structure and open the a-file.

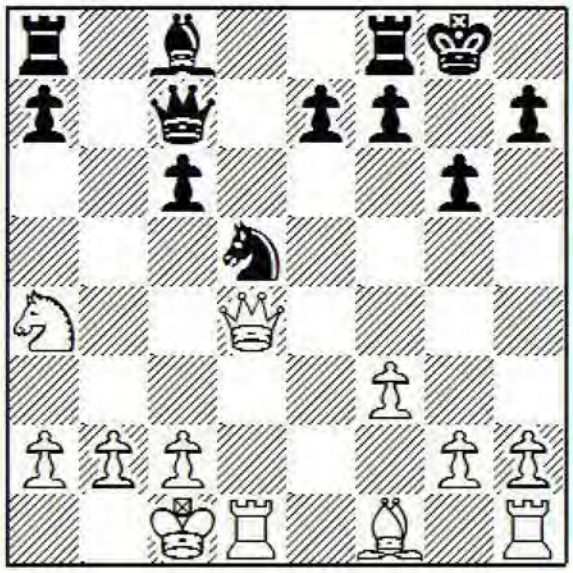
Black has a popular alternative in 13 ... Qc7, which is favoured by the Belarusian Grandmaster Alexei Fedorov:

a) 14 h4 e5 15 Qc5 Qb6 16 Na4 Qxc5 17 Nxc5 Rb8 was played in E.van den Doel-G.Guseinov, Heraklion 2007 and now 18 c4 is relatively best with 18 ... Nb4 19 a3 Na6 20 Nxa6 Bxa6 21 Rd6 Bb7 analysed by Rogozenco. Here, I think 22 c5 Rbd8 23 Bc4 Rxd6 24 cxd6 maintains an advantage for White.

b) 14 Bc4 e5 (14 ... Nb6 15 Be2 is also just marginally better for White and after 15 ... Be6 16 Qc5 (another Fedorov game saw 16 h4 Rfd8 17 Qe3 Rxd1+ 18 Rxd1 Qh2 19 Qg5 Nd5 20 Nxd5, C.Lutz-A.Fedorov, Katrineholm 1999 and now 20 ... Bxd5 21 h5 f6 22 Qg4 Kf7 is perfectly fine for Black) 16 ... Rfb8 17 g3 Qb7 18 b3 a5 19 a4 Nd5 with a complicated position with mutual chances, although my personal preference veers towards White, A.Shirov-A.Fedorov, European Team Ch. 1999) 15 Qd2 Be6 16 Ne4 Rad8 17 Qh6 f6 18 h4 Qg7 with even chances.

c) 14 Qc5 Qf4+ (14 ... Nxc3 15 Qxc3 is also playable and after 15 ... Be6 16 h4 h5 17 Kb1 Rfd8, both sides have chances) 15 Kb1 Bf5 16 Nxd5 cxd5 17 Qxd5 Rab8 18 Bc4 Qc7 19 Bb3 Rbd8, and a draw was agreed in Z.Almasi-Ki.Georgiev, Stocar Banka 1996. Although Black will be winning the pawn back shortly, there is still plenty left to play for.

d) 14 Na4 has a positional idea – to take control over the weak c5-square and to prepare c2-c4 to evict the d5-knight.



The downside is that it is incredibly slow and after 14 ... Rb8 15 a3 Rd8 16 c4?? (this is White's game plan, but it fails to consider Black's aggressive and very strong response) 16 ... Bf5! 17 cxd5 cxd5+ 18 Kd2 Qa5+! 19 Ke2 e5! 20 Qh4 d4 and now the a4-knight is lost. With the remaining White pieces completely uncoordinated and the exposed king mostly getting in the way, the game is soon over. White is promptly dispatched after 21 b3 Rxb3 22 Kf2 Rc8 23 Qe7 Qxa4 24 Kg3 Re8 and he resigned in V.Akopian-R.Mamedov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013.

14 Na4

Pushing Black to make a decision regarding the queen. Obviously, White would love for Black to exchange on d4. After all, he has already gained control over the c5-square and possesses a superior pawn structure. Thus the trade will definitely give White definitely the better chances.

Alternatively, 14 Nxd5 cxd5 15 Qxd5 is not worth the risk as Black gets excellent compensation for the pawn after 15 ... Be6 16 Qd4 Qa5 17 a3 Rab8.

14 ... Qc7

The immediate retreat is an interesting choice. Previously Black typically gave preference to 14 ... Qa5, pushing White to guard the knight with b2-b3, weakening the dark squares around the king. After 15 b3 (the immediate concern is of course Black playing 15 ... e5) 15 ... Be6 16 Bc4 Rfd8 17 Qc5 Qc7 18 Kb1 Nf4 19 g3 Bxc4 20 Qxc4 Nd5 21 Rhe1 Nb6 22 Qe4 Nxa4 23 Qxa4 e6, chances are completely even, M.Adams-G.Jones, Sheffield 2011.

15 Bc4

Thus far, almost everyone has been trying to find an advantage with this move.

Question: What is the purpose of this? Surely White doesn't intend to hack off the Nd5?

Answer: This move solidifies White's queenside pawn structure from potential b-file pressure with either a future Bb3 or ... b2-b3.

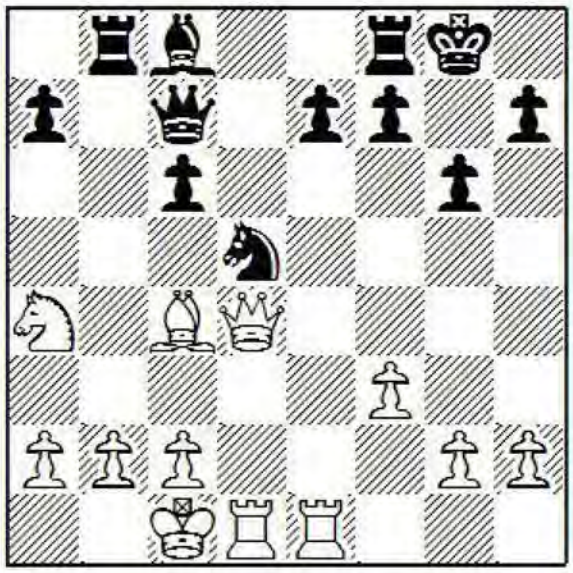
15 ... Rb8!?

The alternative is 15 ... Rd8 which is perfectly playable for Black too:

a) 16 Nc5 Bf5 17 Bb3 Nf4 18 Qf2 Rxd1+ 19 Rxd1 Rd8 20 Rxd8+ Qxd8 21 g3 Qd4 22 Qxd4 Ne2+ 23 Kd2 Nxd4 24 Ke3 Nxc2+ 25 Bxc2 Bxc2 and although Black is a pawn up, there is no reason why White should lose this endgame, O.Korneev-G.Jones, Bunratty 2014.

b) 16 Bb3 Be6 (16 ... Bf5 17 g4 Nf4 18 Qe3 Be6 19 h4 Bxb3 20 axb3 Ng2 21 Rxd8+ Rxd8 22 Qe4 Qf4+ 23 Qxf4 Nxf4 and Black has somewhat better chances, V.Ivanchuk-M.Carlsen, Leon 2009) 17 Nc5 Nf4 18 Nxe6 Nxe6 19 Qe3 Nf4 20 g3 Nd5 21 Qg5 e6 22 Rd4 Rd7 23 Rhd1 and a draw was agreed in M.Adams-P.Nielsen, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011.

16 Rhe1



With the dark-squared bishop being absent from the defence of Black's king, 16 h4 makes a lot of sense. After 16 ... Rb4, 17 h5 is actually still possible as. 17 ... Qf4+ (on the other hand 17 ... Rxa4?? would be a blunder because of 18 hxg6 e5 19 Qh4 fxg6 20 Bxd5+ cxd5 21 Qxa4, leaving Black a clear exchange down) 18 Qxf4 Nxf4 19 b3 Nxh5 20 Nc5 Nf6 21 Rhe1 Re8 leaves White with the slightly better chances (despite being a pawn down), but not more than that.

16 ... Rb4?!

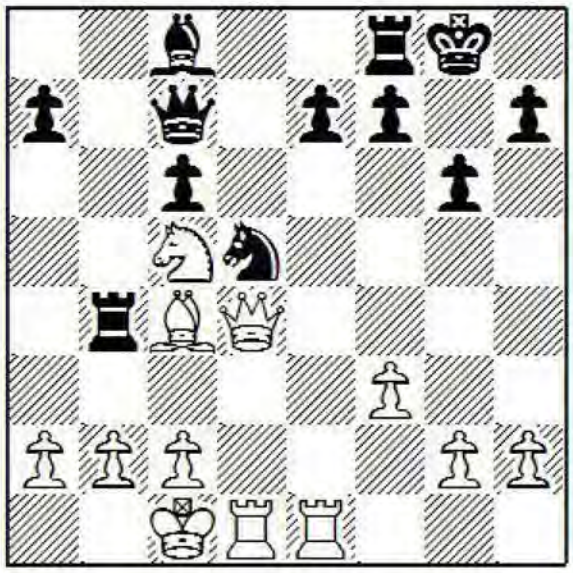
While this active move certainly has its appeal, it also leaves the rook loose and flailing. The immediate pawn grab 16 ... Qxh2!? seems possible, say after 17 Bxd5 cxd5:

a) 18 Rh1 Qxg2 19 Qf4 Bf5 20 Rh2 Rb4 21 Qh6 Qxh2 22 Qxh2 Rxa4 23 Rxd5 Rc8 and now, to ward off the attack, White can play 24 Rxf5 gxf5 25 Qg3+ Kf8 26 Qe5 f6 27 Qxf5 with even chances.

b) 18 Rxe7 Qxg2 19 Nc3 Qg5+ 20 Rd2! Be6 and Black looks fine (20 ... Qxe7?! looks rather risky as 21 Nxd5 Qe6 22 Nf6+ Kh8 23 Nxh7+! Kxh7 24 Rh2+ Qh3 25 Rxh3+ Bxh3 26 Qh4+ Kg7 27 Qxh3 gives White decent though slight winning chances in the ending).

17 b3

White guards both minor pieces with the pawn, which is fine, but this opens up some exchange sacrifice shenanigans as we will see shortly. However, 17 Nc5! looks like a stronger option.



For instance:

a) 17 ... Qxh2 18 Nd3 Qh6+ (18 ... Ra4?! 19 b3 Rxa2 20 Kb1 Ra5 21 Ne5 is clumsy and doesn't look as an attractive alternative for Black) 19 Rd2 Rb7 20 Ne5 Rc7 21 Nxc6 Rxc6 22 Bxd5 Rc7 and White has the edge thanks to his better piece placement and coordination.

b) 17 ... Nb6?? 18 Bxf7+, and the loose rook drops off.

c) 17 ... e5 18 Qh4 Nf4 19 Re4! (Jones mentions 19 b3? Rxc4! 20 bxc4 Nxg2, regaining the exchange) and White has the upper hand. After 19 ... Qb6, Jones offers two interesting lines:

b1) 20 Qe7 Rxb2 21 Bb3 Nd5 22 Rxd5! cxd5 23 Rxe5 Rxb3 24 axb3 (Jones) gives White a pleasant positional plus with more active pieces, a strong knight and the better pawn structure.

b2) 20 Qf6!? Qxc5 (20 ... Rxb2? is obviously a no-go due to 21 Bxf7+ Rxf7 22 Rd8+ and White wins) 21 Bxf7+ Rxf7 22 Rd8+ Rf8 23 Qxf8+ Qxf8 24 Rxf8+ Kxf8 25 Rxb4 and this "leaves an interesting unbalanced ending" (Jones).

b3) 20 Nd3!? looks solid as 20 ... Nxd3+ 21 Rxd3 Rxb2 22 Bb3 Rxb3 23 Rxb3 leaves White better.

17 ... Qxh2!

This pawn is sometimes rather hot but the capture here is definitely critical. As Black can exchange queens on f4, he shouldn't get mated.

18 a3

White prefers to keep a positional grip on the position rather than recapturing his lost pawn. After 18 Qxa7 Qf4+ 19 Rd2 Rxc4! 20 bxc4 Qxc4, Black has excellent counterplay for the exchange.

18 ... Rb7

Black plays solidly, but as Mihail Marin points out, Black can also consider the exchange sacrifice 18 ... Rxa4!? 19 bxa4 Qxg2 which looks like an interesting option for Black. For instance, 20 Bxd5 cxd5 21 Rxe7 Bf5 22 Rc7 Qxf3 is a position that is hard to assess.

19 Nc5 Rc7 20 g4

It would be reasonable to assume that it would be in White's interest to avoid the exchange of queens with 20 Rd2:

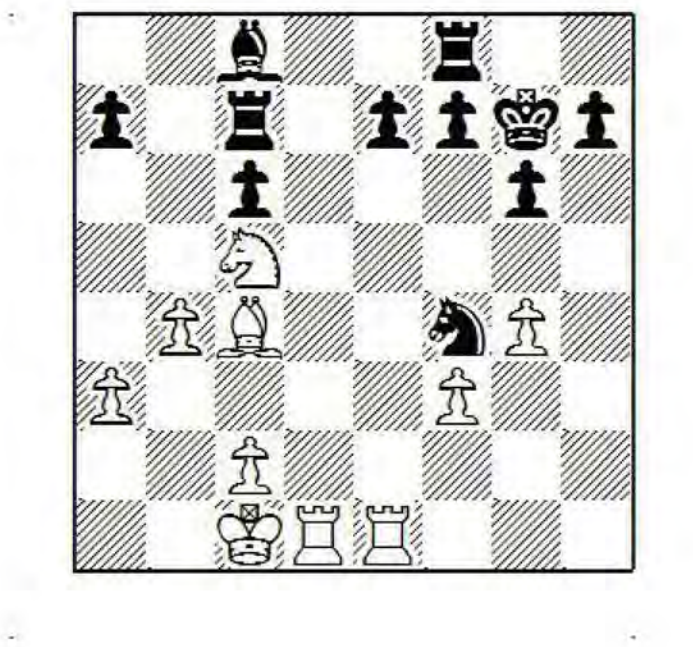
a) 20 ... Qf4?! is clearly insufficient because of 21 Bxd5 Qxd4, and now White has regained the pawn with 22 Bxf7+ and is obviously better.

b) 20 ... Nb6 is likely the most solid, but also quite passive, e.g. 21 Kb2 Qg3 22 Ree2, and White clearly has enough compensation for the pawn.

20 ... Qf4+ 21 Qxf4 Nxf4

Some of the dust has settled, Black has won a pawn and the queens have come off.

22 b4 Kg7



Question: How will you evaluate this position?

Answer: Both sides have strong knights, but aside from that, all of White's pieces are very strongly placed, whereas Black's are very passive and to some extent uncoordinated. But to balance this, Black has an extra pawn, which is part of the large four versus two pawn majority on the kingside; this can potentially cause White major headaches, if not firmly kept under control.

23 Ba6?

This is a fairly big mistake by White, quite possibly overlooking Black's strong response. The simple 23 Kb2 would have left White with active pieces and good compensation for the missing pawn.

23 ... Ne6!

Forcing an exchange of White's strong c5-beast, leaving Black the only winning chances. After 23 ... Bxa6 24 Nxa6 Rb7 25 Nc5, a draw by repetition would be the conclusion of the game.

24 Nxe6+

Of course, 24 Bxc8 is met by 24 ... Nxc5, making things worse for White.

24 ... Bxe6 25 Re5 Rh8!

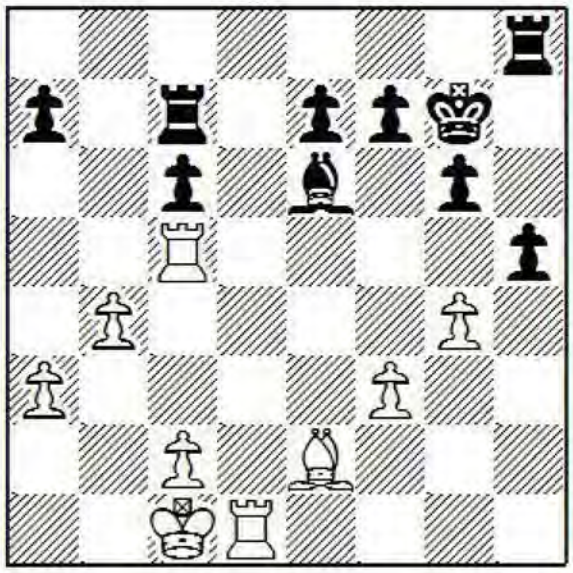
A simple, but strong idea: Put the rook behind the pawn and push it forward.

26 Rc5 h5

The logical consequence of the previous move, threatening to create a nasty passed pawn with ... h5-h4.

27 Be2

Another unpleasant continuation for White is 27 gxh5 Rxh5 28 Rxh5 gxh5 29 Rh1 Kg6 and though things are not yet winning for Black, it is tough to defend this.



27 ... Rd7!?

An interesting idea by Black, activating the rook. If White now carelessly takes on c6, then Black will exchange rooks on d1, making the h-pawn unstoppable. However, it is probably not the strongest move. Black could consider two other moves:

a) 27 ... hxg4 28 fxg4 Rh3, intending 29 Kb2 Rg3 30 Rd4 f6 with better chances for Black.

b) 27 ... h4! looks best, creating a dangerous passed pawn after 28 Rh1 f6 29 Kd2 g5 (Jones) when White is forced to keep an eye on the passed pawn, giving Black time to organise and activate his pieces further.

28 Rh1

A dual purpose move:

1) If Black exchanges on g4, White wants to trade a pair of rooks to lighten the defensive load.

2) If Black marches on with the h-pawn, then the rook will be there to keep matters somewhat under control.

28 ... hxg4

Black should probably have given preference to 28 ... h4, although this idea would have been stronger on the previous move.

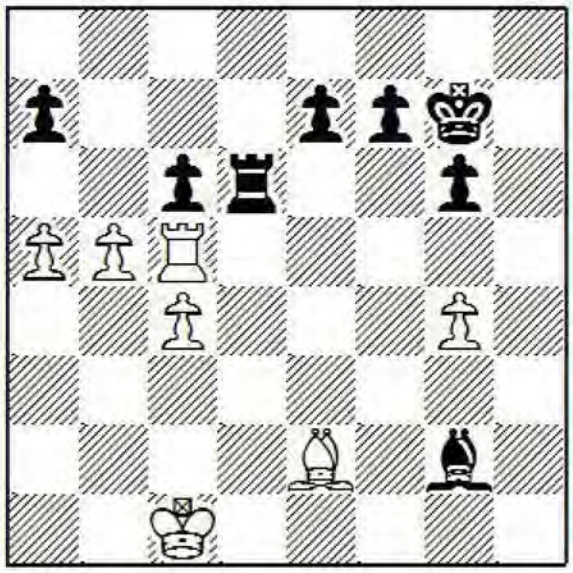
29 Rxh8 Kxh8 30 fxg4 Bd5 31 b5

Gawain Jones suggests 31 Kd2 Kg7 32 Ke3 to get the king activated, intending to meet 32 ... f5 with 33 g5 with decent drawing chances.

31 ... Rd6!

If Black makes the immediate exchange on b5, White's pieces become too active after 31 ... cxb5 32 Bxb5 Rd6 33 Rc7 a6 34 Be2 Re6 35 Kd2 Kg7 36 g5 f5 37 gxf6+ Kxf6 and while Black has an extra pawn, White has excellent chances of saving a draw.

32 c4 Bg2 33 a4 Kg7 34 a5



34 ... cxb5?!

This move throws the last bit of meaningful advantage away As Gawain Jones points out in his annotations to the game, 34 ... f6! fixing the white rook in a box on c5 would have done nicely to keep the advantage after 35 Bd1 (35 b6?! is strongly met by 35 ... Rd7!, keeping the pawn reined in without allowing the c5-rook to escape, until Black is ready and 36 Bd1 axb6 37 axb6 Rb7 38 Ra5 Rxb6 should lead to a Black win) 35 ... Kf7 and Black keeps the king closer to potential action on the queenside, while preparing to push his own e- and f-pawns forward.

35 cxb5 Rd7 36 Bc4 e6?!

After this move, it becomes rather easy for White to stop any attempt of progress by Black. A slightly better attempt, though by no means a win, is 36 ... Bf3!? and after 37 g5 f6 38 Kc2 fxg5 39 Rxg5 Kf6 40 Rg1 Be4+ 41 Kc3 g5, Black has an extra pawn but White should be able to hold it without too many problems.

37 Kc2 Kf6 38 g5+!

Now Black is unable to get connected passed pawns. White would have played the same move had Black played 37 ... Kf8.

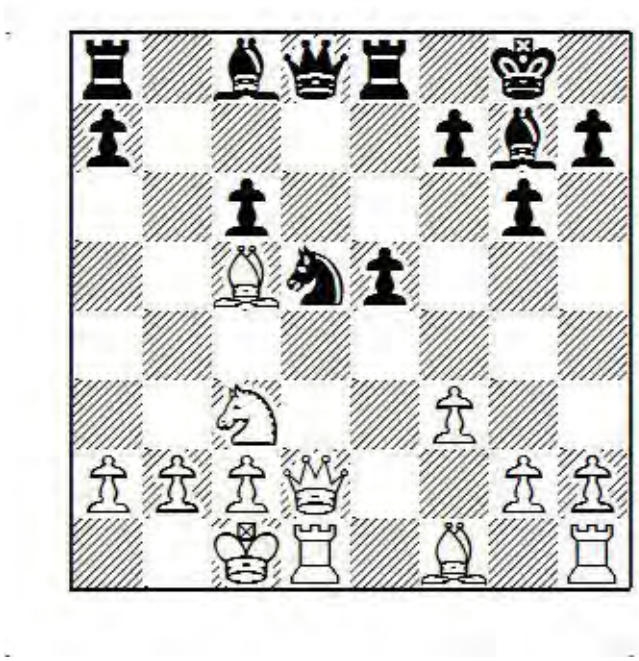
38 ... Ke7 39 Kc3 Kd6 40 Kb4 Re7 41 Rc8 Rb7 42 a6 Rd7 43 Bb3 Rc7 44 Rxc7 Kxc7 ½-½

Game 30
N.De Firmian-T.Ernst
Stockholm 2002

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4 e5

This is the older main line, whereas the newer continuations, 12 ... Nxc3 and 12 ... Bxd4 were the topics of the previous main games. The text move is in the midst of some level of crisis theoretically as most lines leading to a small, but annoying plus for White. That being said, many players are taking on the Black side without worries.

13 Bc5 Re8



Question: This move is forced, right?

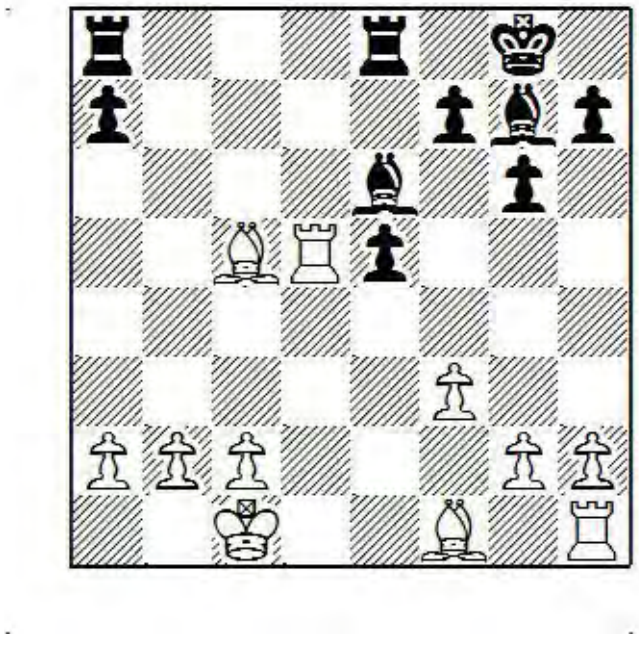
Answer: No, in fact this line has never been particularly popular because White can force Black into an endgame that is not particularly interesting to play or defend. But if you are playing against a higher-rated opponent and are not too worried about holding the balance, then this line isn't a terrible a choice.

Instead, the main line is 13 ... Be6 which we will cover in Games 31 and 32.

14 Ne4!?

For those who are not too concerned about the possibility of 14 ... Be6 (transposing back into the main lines that typically arise after 13 ... Be6 14 Ne4 Re8), then this line is perfectly fine. A look at the other options:

a) The main alternative is the aforementioned endgame 14 Nxd5 cxd5 15 Qxd5 (15 Bb5 wins an exchange, but Black is perfectly okay with handing that over after 15 ... Be6 16 Bxe8 Qxe8 17 Qa5 Qc6 18 Rd3 d4 19 Re1 h5 20 Ra3 Bf5 and Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange thanks to his bishop pair and strong central pawns, L.Hazai-M.Petursson, Tallinn 1981) 15 ... Qxd5 16 Rxd5 Be6.



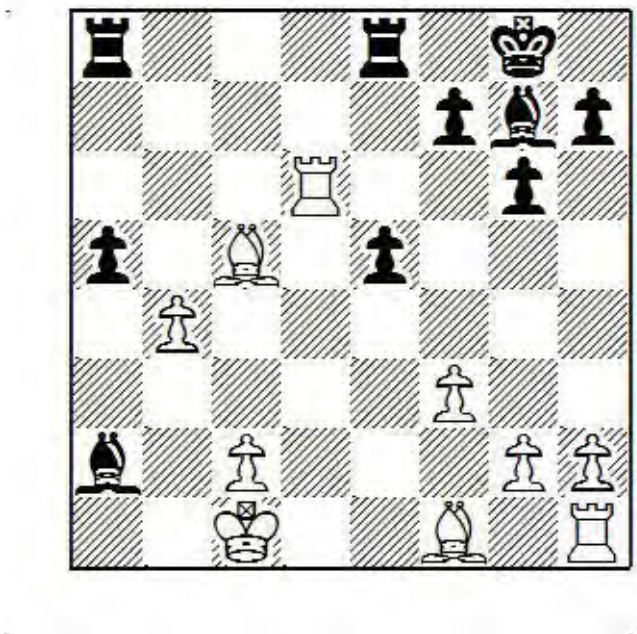
This is a key position for this variation. Now White has tried:

a1) 17 Rd6 Bxa2! (17 ... Bf8 18 Rc6 Bd5 19 Rc7 Bh6+ 20 Kb1 e4 21 fxe4 Rxe4 22 Bd3 Rg4 was played in G.Sigurjonsson-L.Karlsson, Randers (zonal) 1982 and now 23 Rd1 Rxg2 24 Bf1 Rd2 25 Rxd2 Bxd2 26 Rxa7 would have been clearly better for White) and now:

a11) 18 Bd3?! Bh6+ 19 Kd1 Rab8 20 b3? Rec8 21 Bxa7 Rb7 (21 ... Ra8!? is probably even stronger) 22 Bb6 Bxb3 23 Ke2 Bxc2 24 Ba6 Bb3 25 Bxb7 Rc2+ with a very uncomfortable endgame for White in T.Wedberg-S.Kudrin, Copenhagen 1983.

a12) 18 b3 looks like it could be a critical test to Black's previous move, but in fact it is quite harmless after 18 ... Rec8 19 Rd5 a5 20 Kb2 a4 21 Kxa2 axb3+ 22 Kxb3 Ra5 23 Kb4 Raxc5 24 Rxc5 Bf8 and a draw is very likely.

a13) 18 b4 and now 18 ... a5 is Black's most precise move (18 ... Bf8 is accessed as advantageous for White by Rogozenco after 19 Ra6 Bxc5 20 Rxc5 Be6 21 Bb5 "due to the strong c-pawn and more active position of his pieces").



Following 19 Bb5 Rec8 20 Bd7 Rc7 21 Bc6! Rac8 22 b5 Bf8 23 Rhd1 Bxd6 24 Rxd6 Rb8 25 b6 Rcc8 26 Bf2 Be6 27 Be4 a4 28 b7, Y.Kruppa-S.Tiviakov, Kherson 1991, a draw was agreed as it is imminent that Black will play ... Rc7 followed by ... Rxb7.

a2) 17 Rd3 Rec8 (Black can improve with 17 ... a5!? 18 Kb1 Rec8 19 Be3 Rab8 20 b3 a4 with ample compensation for the pawn) 18 Be3 Bxa2 19 Ra3 Be6 20 Ba6 Rc7 21 Rd1 Rb8 22 Ra5 h5 23 Rb5 Rxb5 24 Bxb5, and White is at best marginally better, V.Nevostrujev-V.Zaitsev, Kemerovo 2012.

Let's return to the position after 13 ... Re8 in the stem game:

b) 14 Bc4 Qh4 15 Bxd5 (15 Nxd5? Qxc4 16 Nc7 Qxa2 17 Qc3 Bh6+ 18 Be3 Bxe3+ 19 Qxe3 Qa1+ 20 Kd2 Qa5+ wins easily for Black) 15 ... cxd5 16 g3 (16 Nxd5 Qc4! 17 Ne7+ Kh8 18 Qd5 Qf4+ 19 Kb1 Be6 20 Qc6 Qh4 21 Nd5?! Rec8 22 Nc7 Rab8 gives Black a devastating initiative, T.Ernst-M.Petursson, Copenhagen 1981) 16 ... Qh5 17 Qxd5 Be6 18 Qd3 Rec8 19 g4 Qh3 20 Ba3 e4 21 Nxe4 Bxa2 22 Rd2 was seen in D.Pikula-M.Hoffmann, Basel 2006 and now 22 ... Rab8 23 Rhd1 h5 24 g5 Qe6 would have been quite nice for Black as he certainly has sufficient compensation for the pawn.

14 ... f5

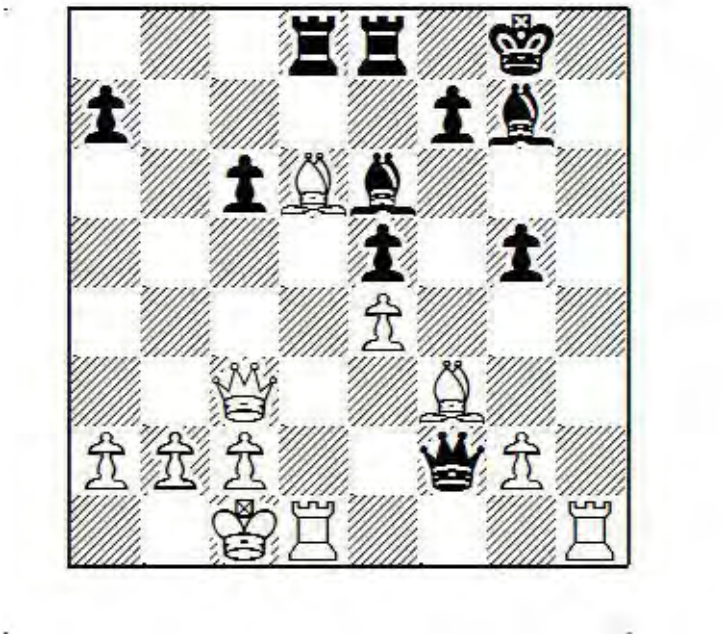
A less committal and safer alternative can be found in 14 ... Qc7 which has been championed by Ukrainian grandmaster Mikhail Golubev. Now White has tried:

a) 15 h4!? Rd8 16 h5 f5 17 hxg6 (17 h6 Bh8 18 Ng5 Bf6 19 Bc4 Rb8 20 Bb3 a5 21 a4?! Rxb3 22 cxb3 Nf4 and White is in trouble, A.Volokitin-M.Golubev, Internet (blitz) 2004) 17 ... fxe4 18 fxe4 Be6 19 exd5 cxd5 20 Ba3 (20 gxh7+!? Kh8 21 Be3 isn't without merit) 20 ... hxg6 21 g4 e4 22 Qg5 Qf7 23 Be2 Bf6 24 Qe3 d4 25 Qxe4 Bd5 26 Qd3 Bxh1 27 Rxh1 Re8 and White had to start defending accurately, A.Shirov-M.Golubev, Bundesliga 2001.

b) 15 Bc4 Rd8 16 g4 Be6 17 Qf2 Nf4 18 Bxe6 Nxe6 19 Bd6 Qb6 20 Qxb6, and a draw was agreed in T.Luther-D.Vocaturo, Arvier 2007.

c) 15 Bd6 Qb6 16 h4 Nf6!? 17 h5 Nxe4 18 fxe4 Be6 19 hxg6 hxg6 20 Qc3 Rad8 21 Be2 Qf2! 22 Bf3

and now Polzin does not wish to defend passively a slightly inferior position. He comes up with an unexpected idea to create activity and disturb White's pieces with 22 ... g5!?.



It seems strange to expose the kingside without provocation but now White will have to deal with a future ... g5-g4. Following 23 b3 Qg3 24 Kb2 g4 25 Be2 Qxc3+ 26 Kxc3 Bd5!, Black managed to exchange down into a manageable endgame, A.Shirov-R.Polzin, Germany 2004 Thanks to this small tactical trick, Black conveniently simplifies the position.

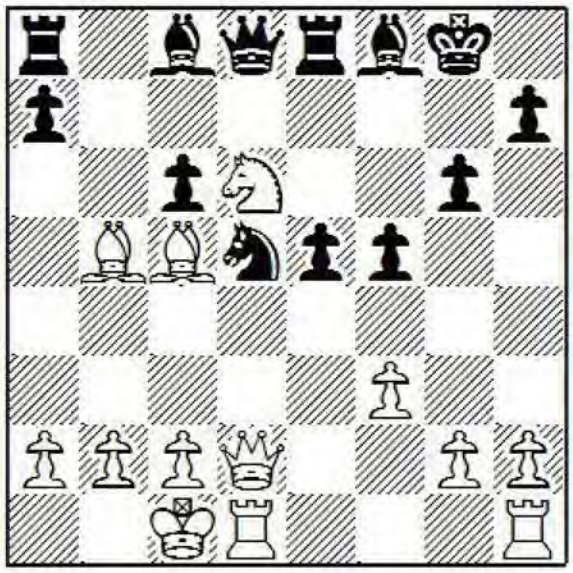
15 Nd6

A key, but ultimately harmless alternative is 15 Bc4 fxe4 16 fxe4 Qh4 17 Qd3 Kh8 18 exd5 Bf5 19 Qc3 (or 19 Qe2 cxd5 20 Rxd5 Rac8 21 Bb3 Be4 22 g3 Qg5+ 23 Be3 Qe7 24 Bc5 Qg5+ 25 Be3 Qe7 26 Bc5 Qg5+ with a draw in J.van der Wiel-B.Alterman, Internet (rapid) 1995) 19 ... cxd5 20 Bxd5 Rac8 21 Rd2 Bh6 22 b4 a5 23 a3 axb4 24 axb4 Bxd2+ 25 Qxd2 Rcd8 26 Be3 Rxd5 27 Qxd5 Qxb4 and thanks to a minor miracle, White was able to hold this miserable position, E.van den Doel-T.Ernst, Ghent 2014.

15 ... Bf8

This is the key point of Black's move order in this line and why he avoided 13 ... Be6. Obviously if Black wants to play this line, he cannot be worried about the endgame that can arise after 14 Nxd5.

16 Bb5!



Question: Wow! This looks very unpleasant. It looks like Black's position is already completely falling apart? Or is it?

Answer: Not quite falling apart, but Black has to be very careful. This clever move of Alexander Beliavsky was first tested in his 1993 game against Khalifman, a game which put the entire line with 14 ... f5 under a serious cloud. This is also why it is important to work through these lines. A move like 16 Bb5 is very difficult to face unprepared at the board.

Previously White had played 16 Nxe8, but 16 ... Bxc5 17 c4 f4 18 Kb1 Rb8 19 cxd5 Bd4 20 b3 cxd5 is fine for Black.

16 ... Bd7 17 Ba4!

This subtle retreat has given Black much grief in both over-the-board and correspondence praxis.

Prior to this game, White had tried several tricky options. Black appears to be okay, at least the Swedish grandmaster behind the black pieces must think so. Some of these options are:

a) 17 Ba6?! Bxd6 18 Bxd6 Bc8! 19 Bxc8 Qxd6 20 Bb7 Rad8 with a pleasant position for Black.

b) 17 c4 Bxd6! 18 Bxd6 Qf6! 19 c5 f4 20 Bc4 Be6 21 Bxd5 Bxd5 and Black should not have much to worry about.

c) 17 Rhe1 Re6 18 Nb7 Qc7 19 Ba6 and White is a bit better, though obviously the position is very complex, A.Beliavsky-A.Khalifman, Belgrade 1993.

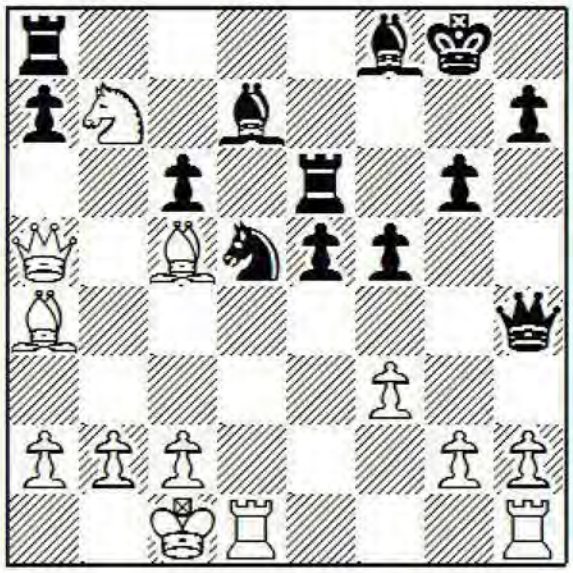
17 ... e4?!

Black forces the situation in the centre, which is not necessarily an amazing idea, when the opponent's pieces are as well-coordinated as the case here. The alternatives, however, are not entirely enticing either:

a) 17 ... Bxd6 18 Bxd6 e4 (18 ... Qf6 19 Bc5 is clearly better for White) 19 Rhe1.

b) 17 ... Qh4 18 Bb3 and now 18 ... Bh6 (or 18 ... Be6 19 Bf2 and White wins the exchange without a trace of compensation for Black) is simply met by 19 Be3 Bxe3 20 Qxe3 and Black loses material. The most immediate threat is 21.Rxd5 cxd5 22.Bxd5+ and Black's position completely collapses.

c) The critical test of the line is 17 ... Re6 though White still retains the upper hand. After 18 Nb7 (18 c4!? Nf6 19 Nb7 Qb8 20 Bxf8 Qxf8 21 Rhe1 is also quite pleasant for White) 18 ... Qh4 19 Qa5!,



White has a clear edge as it is difficult for Black to get his pieces to properly work together. Moreover, Black has a rather suspect structure. Clearly, White has the theoretical upper hand.

18 Bb3!

White presses Black on the soft spot, right in the middle of the belly. White threatens to pick up the exchange on e8 and follow-up with Bxd5, collecting even more material.

18 ... Bxd6

This is really not a move Black wants to play. As we will see in the next couple of main games with this variation, Black frequently gives up an exchange without a worry in the world. However, 18 ... Be6 is the inferior continuation and after 19 Nxe8 Bxc5 20 fxe4 fxe4 21 Bxd5 cxd5 (21 ... Bxd5 22 Qc3 is even worse) 22 Qc3 Qg5+ 23 Kb1 Rxe8 24 Qxc5 Qxg2 25 Qxa7, White has a large advantage.

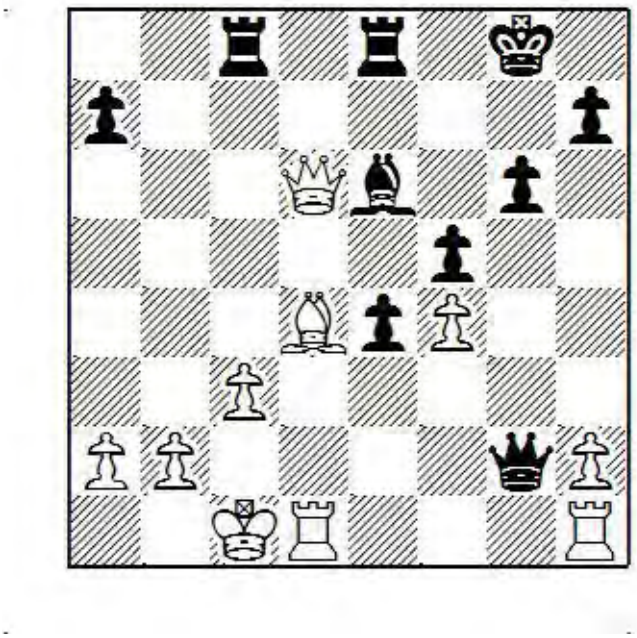
19 Bxd5+

Cashing in on his central pressure. However, White retains a clear advantage with 19 Bxd6 Be6 20 Bc5, thanks to his bishop pair and central control.

19 ... cxd5 20 Qxd5+ Be6 21 Qxd6 Qg5+

Black is playing with fire, keeping the queens on the board, but the alternative 21 ... Qxd6 22 Bxd6 exf3 23 gxf3 isn't any fun for Black unless he fancies defending difficult endgames.

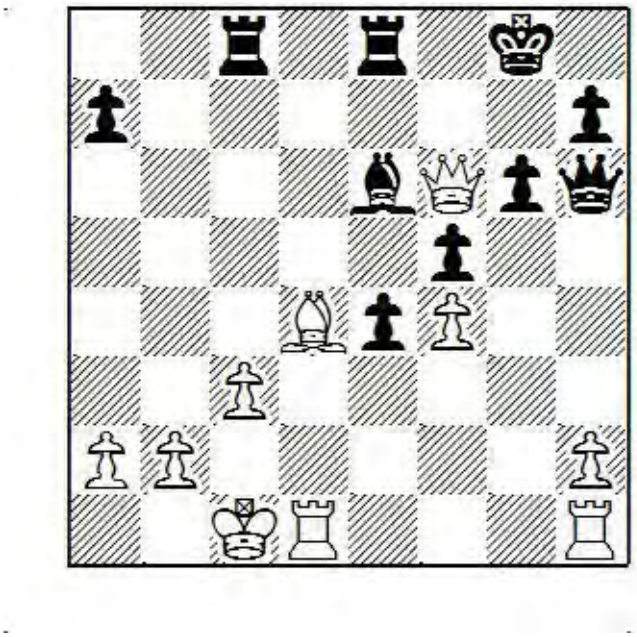
22 f4 Qxg2 23 Bd4 Rac8 24 c3



24 ... Qh3?

This passive move, intending to retreat the queen to h6 to help guard the dark squares, does Black no favours. Instead he should have killed the dark-squared bishop with 24 ... Rcd8! 25 Qe5 Rxd4 26 Qxd4 Bxa2 when Black's control over the light squares, potentially strong passed e-pawn and White's lack of immediate threats against Black's king gives Black excellent chances to hold the game.

25 Qe5 Qh6 26 Qh8+ Kf7 27 Qf6+ Kg8



28 Be5? 1-0

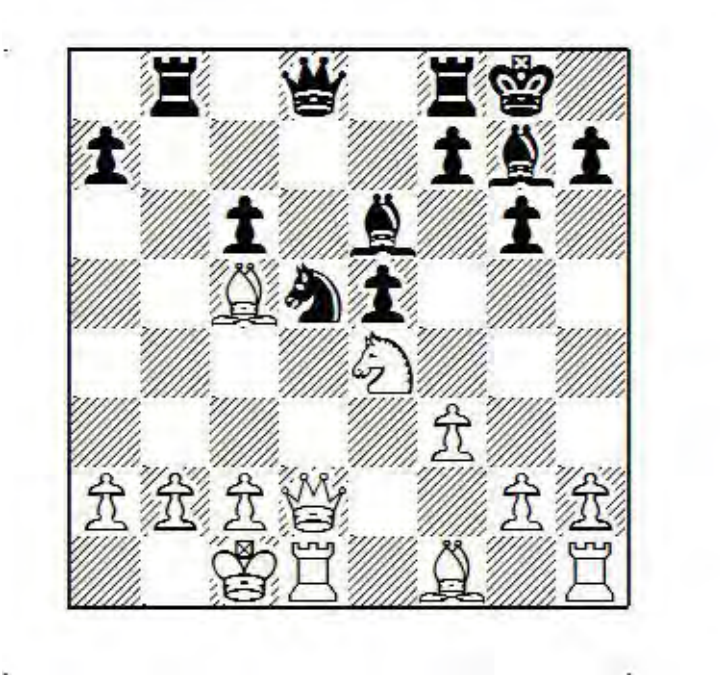
Due to White's threat of 29 Rd6, Black resigned, somewhat prematurely. Black's position is a mess as White has supreme control over the dark squares, while Black's light-squared bishop mainly contributes by taking the d7-square away from an invading rook.

But let's have a look at why Black decided to resign. After 28 ... Rc6 (which is the only move to prevent 29 Rd6) 29 h4 Bd5 (29 ... Rf8? 30 Qe7 Bf7 31 h5!? gxh5 32 Rd6 Rxd6 33 Bxd6 and White is winning – Rogozenco) 30 Qg5 Qxg5 31 hxg5 Be6 32 b3, White certainly is better, though Black can hang on for a long time. So the bottom line is that Black threw the towel in a bit too early.

However, 28 h4! is much stronger, for instance, after 28 ... Rcd8 29 h5, now Black has to start getting desperate to hang on. In any case, he is hopelessly lost.

Game 31
F.Nijboer-A.David
Wijk aan Zee 1997

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4 e5 13 Bc5 Be6 14 Ne4 Rb8!?



In our last main game in this chapter (Game 32), we will examine the main line 14 ... Re8.

15 Ba3?!

Question: Am I missing something obvious or does White not win an exchange by taking the rook on f8?

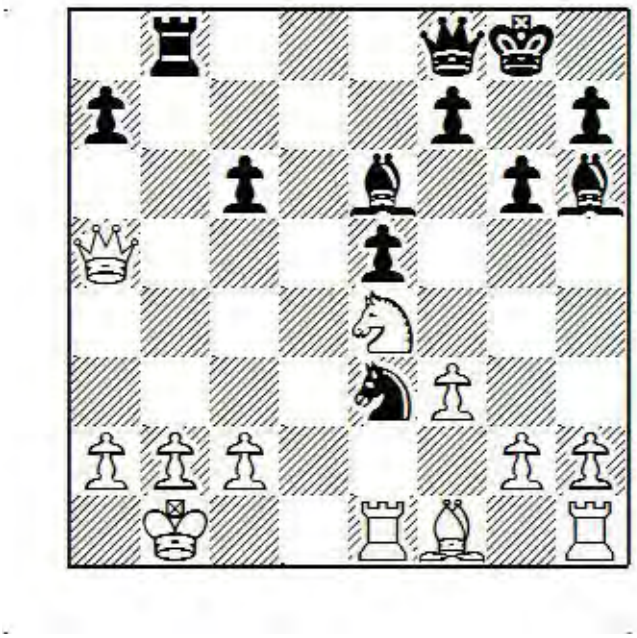
Answer: You are absolutely right, both on this and the previous move, White could pick up the exchange on f8. However, it has been established that Black gets excellent compensation for the material because White loses control over the dark squares. With the bishop on c5 and the knight on e4, White has some sort of grip on the position, not allowing Black's pieces to roam at their full potential.

White has tried many moves in this position. The text move is an interesting, but ultimately bad choice. White wants to guard the b2-pawn with the bishop and make room on c5 for either the knight or possibly a pawn that can support a knight on d6. Those are admirable objectives, but it is very time-consuming and too slow for a fast action opening such as the Yugoslav Dragon.

In addition to the text move, White has tried several other moves, which we will look at next. The interesting part of looking at books on the Dragon and other sharp openings that are some years old is that they have so many mistakes in them. They are mostly tactical issues that are missed on account of engines either not being used or being much weaker than today's software. That is definitely the case for much of the analysis on this variation. That will undoubtedly also be the case for this book in some years. Therefore, make sure you take your time to go through these variations and if something doesn't look right or make sense to you, take your time to analyse the position and gain and understanding of what is happening and then go over it with an engine to confirm the analysis. Let's have a look at the alternatives:

a) Firstly, we must examine the exchange grab 15 Bxf8 Qxf8 16 Qa5!? and now 16 ... Ne3!? is probably best:

a1) 17 Re1?! Bh6 18 Kb1? was played in A.R.Uta-B.Anu, Chotowa 2010.



Question: Can you find the continuation that will ensure Black an enduring attack and subsequent kill?

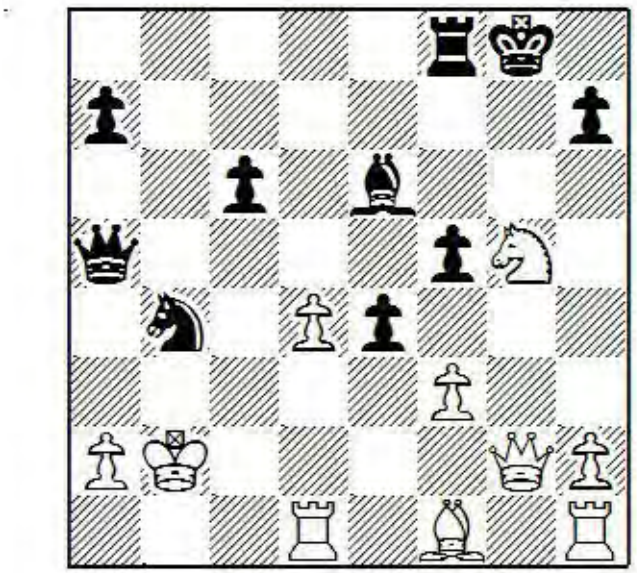
Answer: Send the king on a thankless expedition with 18 ... Rxb2+!! 19 Kxb2 Qb8+ 20 Kc3 (of course not 20 Ka1?? Nc2 mate or 20 Bb5?? Nc4+ winning the queen) 19 ... Nd5+ 21 Kd3 Qb2 22 Qc5 Bf8! 23 Qxa7 f5 and White is lost after ceding control of the c3-square to the rampant queen.

a2) A better try is 17 Rd2 Bc4 18 Bd3 f5 19 Nc3 Bxd3 20 cxd3 Bh6 with compensation for the exchange.

b) 15 g4 has a bad reputation but things are actually not that bad after 15 ... f5 16 gxf5 gxf5:

b1) 17 Rg1!? fxe4 18 Qh6 Qf6 19 Rxg7+ Qxg7 20 Qxe6+ Kh8 21 Bxf8 Qg5+ 22 Kb1 Rxf8, and now White got himself into trouble after 23 Qxc6 (but 23 f4! – another computer discovery saves the day as 23 ... Qxf4 24 Be2 is okay for White according to the silicon monster) 23 ... Ne3 24 Re1 Nxf1 25 Rxf1 exf3 with a difficult position for White, S.Dolmatov-A.Schneider, Budapest 1982.

b2) 17 Ng5 e4 18 b3 (18 c3!? was thought to lose by force after 18 ... Rxb2 19 Kxb2 Qa5 20 Bd4 Bxd4 21 cxd4 Nb4, but here White has 22 Qg2!! which is an amazing computer find.



This resource allows White to escape with a draw. Try to see if you can work it out against the two key moves: 22 ... Qxa2+ and 22 ... Bd5) 18 ... Nc3 19 Qxc3 Qxg5+ 20 Qd2 Qxd2+ 21 Rxd2 Rfd8, and the chances are about even.

c) 15 c4!? is one of White's better moves and after 15 ... Re8!:

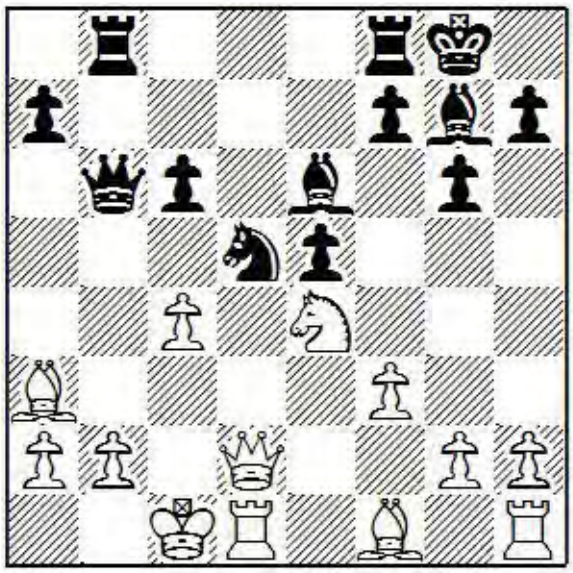
c1) 16 g4 (the knight should not be captured as after 16 cxd5 cxd5 17 Qc3 f5 18 Nd6 e4 19 Rd4 Re7 20 Nb5, G.Serper-J.Nesterov, Jurmala 1982, now 20 ... a6! 21 Bxe7 Qxe7 22 Qb4 Qg5+ is very good for Black) 16 ... Nb6 (16 ... Qh4!? 17 Bxa7 Ra8 18 Bf2 Qe7 19 Bc5 Qc7 20 Kb1 Red8 is interesting with mutual chances) 17 Qxd8 Rexd8 18 Rxd8+ Rxd8 19 b3 gives White the slightly better chances, though Black shouldn't really fear this line, L.Oll-L.Yurtaev, Tallinn 1983.

c2) 16 h4!? is quite possibly White's best move and following 16 ... Nb6 17 Qxd8 Rbxd8 18 Rxd8 Rxd8, White has a minor advantage thanks to his better pawn structure.

d) 15 Bc4!? Re8 16 h4 is likely the most critical line for Black after 14 ... Rb8. Now 16 ... h6 17 Bb3 f5 18 Nd6 Bf8 19 c4 Bxd6 20 Bxd6 Qxd6 21 Qxh6 (White heads straight for the draw though 21 cxd5 cxd5 22 Qxh6 is also worth a try as 22 ... Bf7 23 h5 f4 24 Rd3 Rec8+ 25 Kb1 Rc5 gives mutual chances) 21 ... Qc5 22 Qxg6+ Kf8 23 Qh6+ Kg8 24 Qg6+ Kf8 25 Qh6+ Kg8 26 Qg6+ Kf8 with a truce in A.David-C.Ward, Isle of Man 1997.

e) 15 h4 is another move with a dubious reputation, but quite possibly undeservedly so. After 15 ... f5 16 Ng5 e4, a massive improvement is 17 b3! (tournament praxis has seen 17 ... e3 18 Qd3 Qd7 with a better game for Black in S.Zagrebelny-A.Khalifman, Sochi 1984) 17 ... Qf6 18 Qd4!, White is doing pretty well.

15 ... Qb6!? 16 c4?



This is a part of White's game plan with 15 Ba3, but he is a little too cavalier about his development, particularly considering that Black is already fully developed. That being said, it isn't easy to come up with good suggestions for White:

a) 16 Bc4?! Rfd8 is already unpleasant for White after 17 Qg5 h6! 18 Qh4 (18 Qg3? Nf4 wins instantly for Black) 18 ... Bf8 19 Bb3 Bxa3 20 bxa3 c5 and White is in trouble.

b) 16 h4? Rfd8! (threatening ... Ne3) is also problematic for White.

c) The ugly 16 b3 is possibly best. Black is still better after 16 ... Rfd8 17 Bc5 Qc7 18 g3 h6 (intending ... f7-f5).

16 ... Rfc8

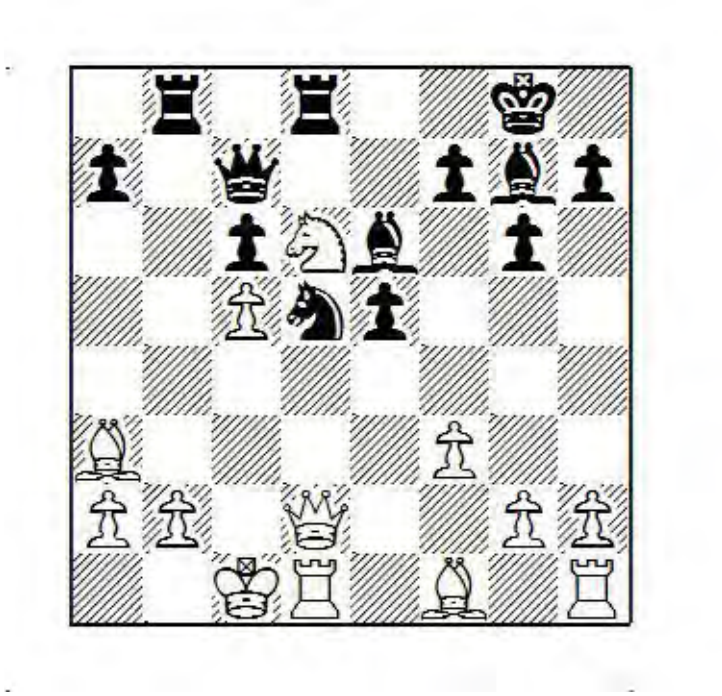
White obviously cannot take the knight, but if he doesn't, then the c8-rook is a little misplaced. Therefore Black can consider another rook move in 16 ... Rfd8! 17 Bc5 (the knight cannot be captured as after 17 cxd5? cxd5 18 Nc3 d4 19 Ne4 Bxa2, Black's threats against the king are irresistible) 17 ... Qc7 18 b3 a5 and it is very difficult for White to find a way to get the pieces coordinated without ending up in

more difficulties, for example, 19 Qe1 Bf5 20 Bd3 a4 21 Bc2 axb3 22 axb3 Nf4, and White is facing a long and difficult defence.

17 Nd6 Rd8 18 c5!

White wisely decides to guard the d6-knight carefully, hoping that it will be a bother for Black, subscribing to the old adage "a knight on the 6th is like a nail in the knee". It certainly indicates a structural defect in Black's position. However, Black's active pieces and lead in development more than compensates for this. For obvious reasons, White should most definitely avoid opening up the position, even for a temporary material gain as 18 cxd5? cxd5 19 Nb5 (19 Kb1 Rxd6 20 Bxd6 Qxd6 and White will soon be unable to to guard against the pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal and the b-file for long) 19 ... Bf5 (preventing the king from running away) 20 Re1 Rdc8+ 21 Kd1 Bc2+ 22 Qxc2 Rxc2 23 Kxc2 a6 24 Nc3 Qc6! 25 Bd3 e4! 26 fxe4 Bxc3 27 exd5 Qxd5 28 Kxc3 Rc8+ 29 Kd2 Qg5+ and suffice to say, Black will at least end up with a winning material advantage.

18 ... Qc7



Question: It looks like Black is admitting defeat, having to accept a white d6-knight. So White has the better chances, right?

Answer: At first glance, you could be right. But aside from White's forward d6-knight, his pieces are uncoordinated and he is far behind in development. In fact, White's king is in a great deal of danger, because the c2-c4-c5 push has weakened a lot of squares.

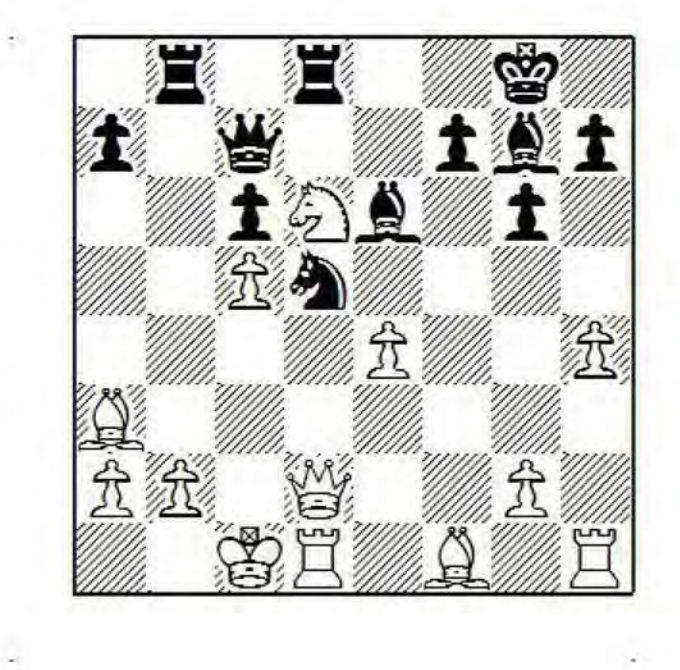
19 h4??

White proceeds unsuspectingly though one should forgive him for overlooking what Black uncorked over the next couple of moves. Nevertheless, he should have concentrated on getting the rest of the pieces developed. A much better choice is 19 Bc4 a5 (19 ... Nf4 20 Bxe6 Nxe6 21 h4 a5 is also very nice for Black) 20 h4 Qe7 21 h5 Bf6 22 Kb1 e4! 23 hxg6 hxg6 24 Bxd5 Bxd5 with a nasty Black initiative.

19 ... e4!

Unleashing the diagonal for Black's Dragon bishop. All of a sudden, Black's pieces are playing together like an orchestra and showing White the folly of neglecting one's development.

20 fxe4



Exercise: Can you find Black's next move.

20 ... Nc3!

Answer: Wow! What an audacious move which White must have completely missed. All of a sudden, White's apparently promising position crumbles. This knight sacrifice shatters the king's abode as the black queen surges into the crime scene.

21 bxc3 Qa5 22 Bb4

And what does Black do now? The alternative 22 Bb2 doesn't help matters at all after 22 ... Qxa2 23 g4 (Black threatened 23 ... Bh6) 23 ... Be5 (intending 24 ... Bf4) 24 Rh2 Rb3 and White will not be able to meet the threats of 25 ... Bxh2 26 Qxh2 Rxc3+ or 25 ... Bxc3 at the same time.

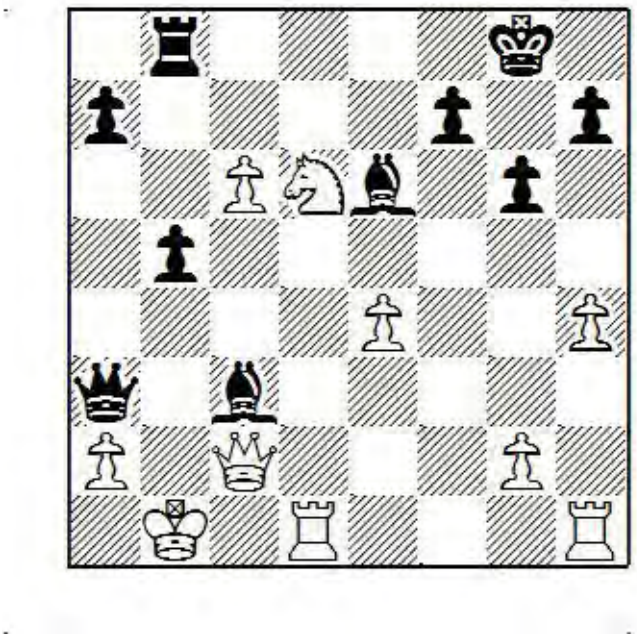
22 ... Rxb4! 23 cxb4 Qa3+ 24 Kb1 Bc3 25 Qc2

Or 25 Qf2 Qxb4+ 26 Kc1 Bg7! (okay, my computer found this elegant retreat, threatening a nasty check on h6!) 27 Rd2 Bh6 and White is almost in zugzwang. Black will at least win the sacrificed material back with interest.

25 ... Qxb4+ 26 Kc1 Qa3+ 27 Kb1 Rb8+! 28 Bb5!

Objectively speaking, this is no better than 28 Nb5 cxb5, but if you have to swindle, a knight on the sixth rank can be a formidable asset.

28 ... cxb5 29 c6!?

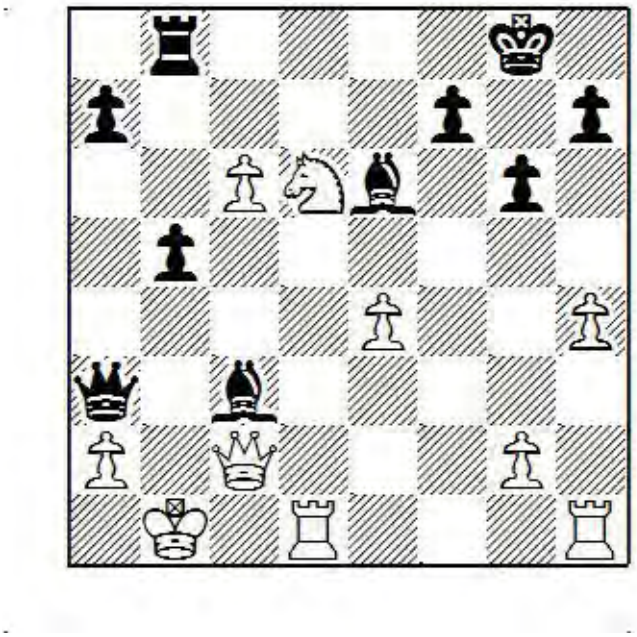


Considering the state White's position is in, every move that throws Black a little off is a good one. This move by itself doesn't impress much, but it leaves Black with something to think about because it is getting close to the promotion square.

29 ... Qb4+ 30 Kc1 Qa3+

This should be a simple repetition of moves to gain time on the clock.

31 Kb1



31 ... Qc5??

I think it is safe to assume that both players were in time trouble at this stage and remained so until the end of the game, judging from the multiple mistakes and inaccuracies on both sides.

Here Black blew a winning opportunity in missing 31 ... Qb4+! 32 Kc1 Be5!? (the computer claims 32 ... Rb6! 33 c7 Rc6 to be even better) 33 c7 Rf8 34 Qd2 (34 c8Q Bf4+ 35 Rd2 Bxc8 also loses for White) and now 34 ... Qc5+ 35 Kb1 Qxc7 is best. I don't see how White will get out of this mess.

32 Rd3

The complicated state of this position is easily indicated by the fact that when Gershon annotated this game in C*hessBase Magazine* soon after the game was played, he called this move a mistake and instead

recommended 32 c7. In fact it is the other way round as 32 c7? loses on account of 32 ... Qxc7! (32 ... Rf8 33 c8Q Qb4+ 34 Kc1 Qa3+ with a draw was Gershon's line) and now 33 h5 b4 34 Rd3 Qa5 gives Black an irresistible attack.

32 ... b4

Not the most accurate move, but not the blunder that Gershon thought it to be. The alternative is 32 ... Qb4+ 33 Kc1 with the following options:

a) 33 ... Qa3+ 34 Kb1 (trying to run away with the king is a non-starter as Gershon pointed out that White loses after 34 Kd1? Bg4+ 35 Rf3 Bxf3+ 36 gxf3 Qxd6+) 34 ... Qb4+ is a draw by repetition.

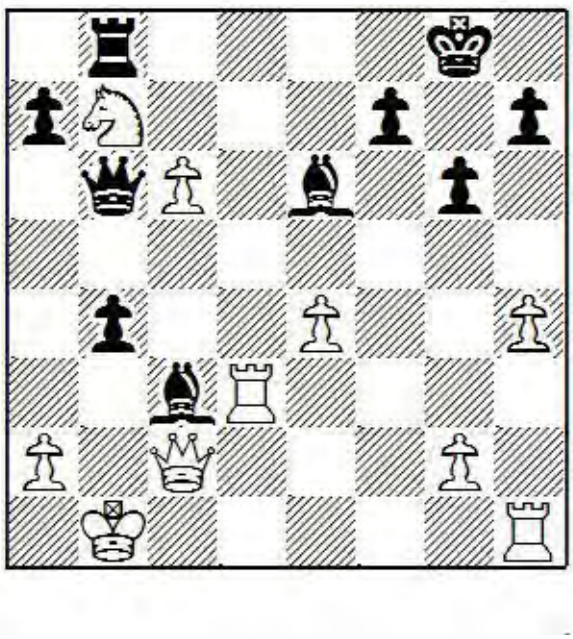
b) 33 ... Be5! 34 Rhd1 (34 c7? loses to 34 ... Bf4+ 35 Rd2 Rf8 36 e5 Qd4! as indicated by Gershon) 34 ... Bf4+ 35 R1d2 Bxd2+ 36 Rxd2 Rd8 37 e5 Qa3+ 38 Kb1 (38 Kd1 is also playable, but possibly better for Black after this long computer line 38 ... Bg4+ 39 Re2 Qe3 40 c7 Rf8 41 c8Q Qg1+ 42 Kd2 Rxc8 43 Nxc8 Bxe2 44 Kxe2 Qxg2+ and when Black picks up another pawn from White, probably the e-pawn, then he should be somewhat better, but it definitely isn't a certain win) 38 ... Rxd6 39 exd6 Bf5 40 Qxf5 gxf5 41 d7 Qb4+ 42 Kc2 Qe4+ 43 Kd1 with a draw by perpetual check (Gershon).

33 Nb7

White does not have time for 33 h5? Qxc6 34 hxg6 fxg6 35 Rhd1 Qa6 and he is in serious trouble.

33 ... Qb6!

Another fascinating decision by Black, with the idea of covering the d8-square to prevent liquidation. The more obvious 33 ... Qxc6 is met by 34 Rd8+ Rxd8 35 Nxd8 Qe8 36 Nxe6 Qxe6 37 h5 which is assessed by the computer as slightly better for White, but the weak white king doesn't exactly promise White an easy time in converting this supposed advantage.



34 Rhd1?!

Another mistake. White's best is 34 h5 Bg4 35 hxg6 hxg6 36 Rg3 Qxc6 37 Rxg4 Rxb7 38 Rgh4 Qe6 39 Qb3 with even chances.

34 ... Bf6?

This, however, is a clear mistake. The surprising 34 ... Bg4! was missed by both players and now 35 Rd8+ Rxd8 36 Rxd8+ Kg7 37 Rd5 Qxc6 38 Nc5 Qf6 promises Black a good game.

35 c7 Rxb7?

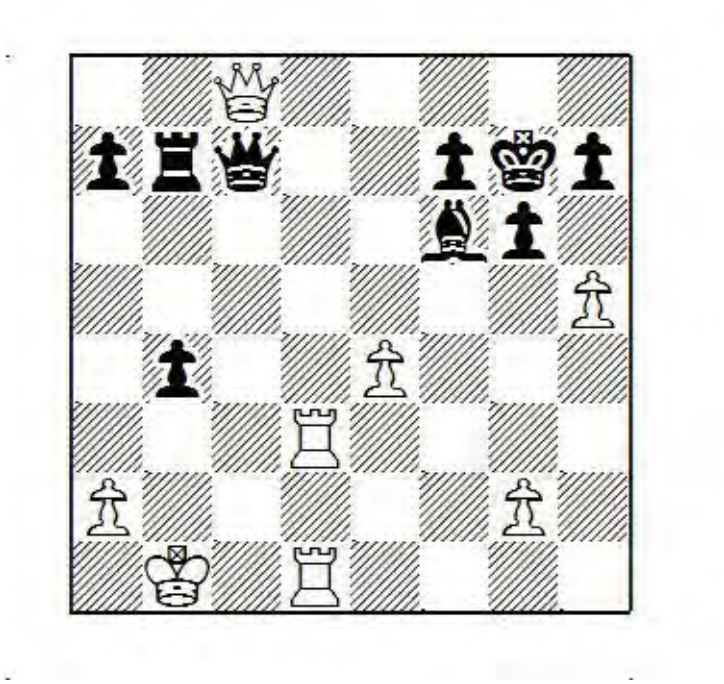
This is not an easy decision to make. Instead, 35 ... Qxb7 36 Rd8+ Rxd8 37 cxd8Q+ Bxd8 38 Rxd8+ Kg7 39 Qd3 Qe7 40 Qd4+ Kh6 41 g3 is better for White, but definitely not a trivial win.

36 c8Q+ Bxc8 37 Qxc8+ Kg7 38 h5!

White doesn't let Black get any chance to breathe quietly for too long.

38 ... Qc7??

Relatively best is 38 ... Rb8 39 Qc1 Qb5 40 h6+! Kg8 41 Qf4 Bg5 42 Rd5! Bxf4 43 Rxb5 Re8 (Black has to keep the back rank defended) 44 Rxb4 Bxh6 45 Rd7 and although White has excellent winning chances, there's still a fair amount of work to be done.



Exercise: How should White continue?

Answer: Force open the h-file and send the king scurrying to his doom.

39 h6+ Kxh6 40 Rh1+ Kg7?

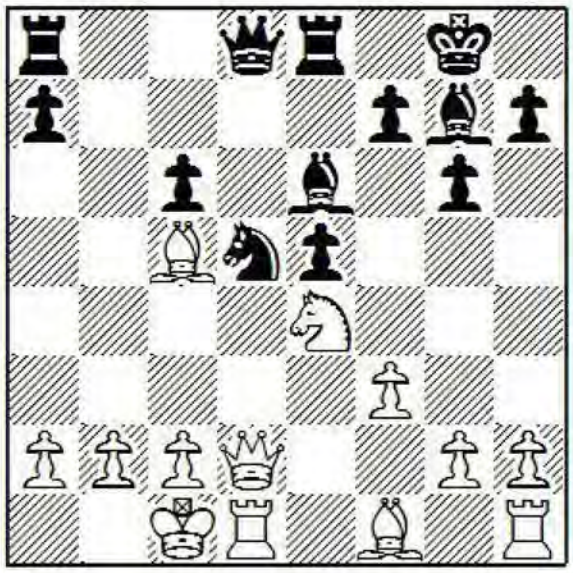
This is of course not the best, but Black is lost in any case. The better move, 40 ... Kg5, loses after 41 Qh3 (or 41 Rd5+ Kf4 42 Rf5+) 41 ... h5 42 Qe3+ Qf4 43 Rd5+ and Black loses the queen.

41 Rxh7+ 1-0

Black resigned without waiting for the finish after 42 Rh3+ Bh4 43 Rxh4+ Kg7 44 Qh8 mate!

Game 32
E.Najer-A.Mista
German League 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 d5 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bd4 e5 13 Bc5 Be6 14 Ne4 Re8



This is the main line of this variation complex. It has been under a bit of a cloud for some years, which is why so many other variations have cropped up for Black. It is not that Black is losing or has a very difficult position but rather that he has few realistic winning chances if White plays precisely. In other words, this line is playable for Black and it may work fine, but if White is well-prepared, then Black has to be ready to settle for a slightly inferior position without much hope of being able to play for a win.

15 h4

The most logical and popular move. Let's see the alternatives:

a) Note that although 15 g4 will usually end up transposing to our main line, Black can digress with 15 ... Nf4 (15 ... h6 16 h4 Qc7 is the transposition to our main line) 16 Qe1 (16 Qc3? looks pretty good but runs headlong into 16 ... Bh6! and Black wins material) 16 ... Qc7 17 Bd6 Qb6 18 Bc5 Qc7 19 Bd6 Qb6 20 Bc5 with a draw by repetition in R.Slobodjan-B.Alterman, Bad Homburg 1996.

b) Somewhat similar to our main game is 15 Bc4 Qc7 16 h4 Nf4 (16 ... h6 17 g4 Red8 18 Qf2 Nf4 19 Bxe6 Nxe6 20 h5 Qa5 21 a3 was A.Sokolov-F.Zeller, Switzerland 2009 and now 21 ... f5!? 22 gxf5 gxf5 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 is about balanced) 17 Bxe6 Nxe6 18 Ba3 Red8 19 Qb4 Rxd1+ 20 Rxd1 Rd8 21 Rxd8+ Qxd8 22 Qe1 Qd5 and Black is doing rather well, E.Najer-P.Wang, Philadelphia 2010.

15 ... h6

Question: What is the point with this move? Surely it can't be to prevent Ng5 as it does not seem like a big threat, does it?

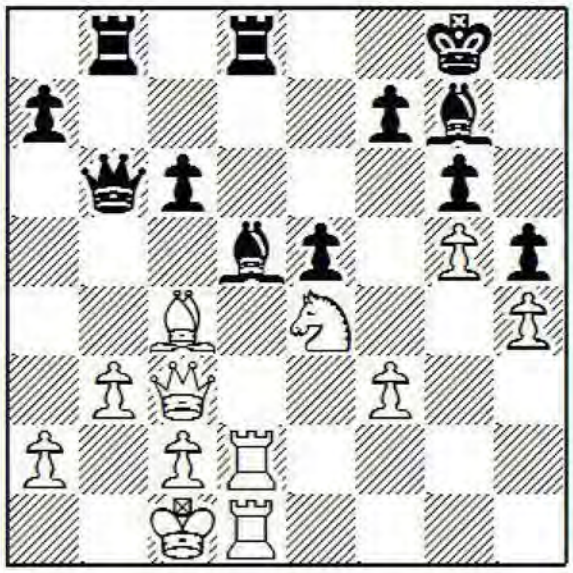
Answer: With ... h7-h6, Black is anticipating White's upcoming plan – which is throwing the pawns forward on the kingside. The text move provides Black flexibility in his pawn structure to prevent the pawn storm from having any serious consequences.

Black has also tried the less flexible 15 ... h5 16 Bc4 Qc7 (16 ... Nf4 17 Qxd8 Rexd8 18 Bxe6 Nxe6 19 Rxd8+ Rxd8 20 Be7 Re8 gave even chances in J.Howell-M.Golubev, Biel 1993) 17 Bb3 a5 18 a4 Nf4 19 Bd6 Qb6 20 Bxe6 Nxe6 21 g4 Qd4 22 Qxd4 Nxd4 23 g5 Rad8 24 c3 Nf5 25 b3 and White had a small, but distinct positional plus which he eventually converted to win the game, R.Ponomariov-T.Hansen, Tromso 2013.

16 g4 Qc7

Black has also tried a couple of other things at this juncture:

a) 16 ... Nf4 17 Qc3 Bd5 18 g5 h5 19 Rh2 Ne6 20 Rhd2 Nxc5 21 Qxc5 Qb6 22 Qc3 Rab8 23 b3 Red8 24 Bc4 and Black has a tough decision to make.



Now rather than 24 ... Bxe4 fxe4 with a small nagging advantage for White, A.Murariu-M.Golubev, Bucharest 2006, Black should instead have played 24 ... Bxc4! 25 Rxd8+ Rxd8 26 Rxd8+ Qxd8 27 Qxc4 Bf8! with better chances to hold.

b) 16 ... a5 17 a4 Qc7 18 g5 h5 19 Bc4 Red8 20 Qh2 Rab8 21 b3 Bf5 22 Rd2 Rd7 23 Rhd1 Rbd8 24 Qf2 Qb8 25 Ba3 Qa8 26 Bb2 and White has consolidated his positional advantage, leaving Black with a somewhat depressing position, M.Perez Candelario-Y.Gonzalez, Havana 2001.

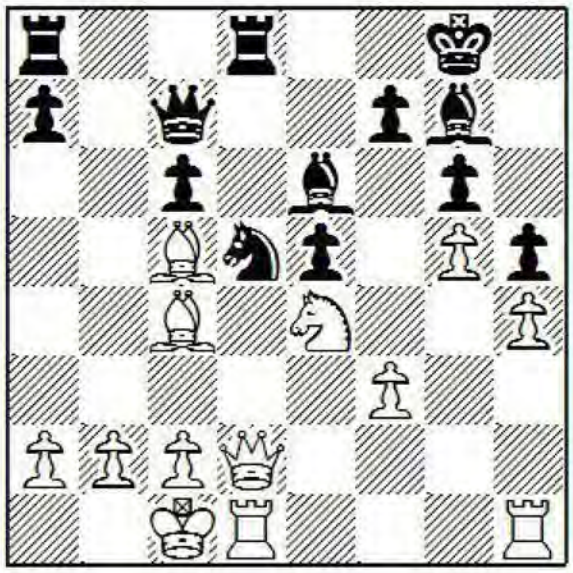
17 g5

White can also push the h-pawn with17 h5 g5 18 Bc4 Red8 19 Qf2 (19 Bf2 a5 20 a4? was played in B.Smith-V.Jianu, Plovdiv 2011, but after 20 ... Nf4 21 Qc3 Rd4, Black is clearly better) 19 ... Nf4 20 Bxe6 Nxe6 21 Bd6 Qa5 22 Kb1 Rd7 23 Rd2 Rad8 24 Rhd1 Qb5 25 c3, and White has a small positional advantage, S.Vokarev-S.Azarov, Kazan 2008.

17 ... h5 18 Bc4

An interesting little rook lift has been tested as well. Following 18 Rh2 Red8 (or 18 ... Nf4 19 Qc3 Bd5 20 Rhd2 Qd7?! 21 Qe3 Qe6 22 c4 Bxe4 23 Qxe4 Qc8 24 Rd6 and White is clearly in control of the game, D.Rodin-A.Gubajdullin, Sochi 2008) 19 Qe1 Rd7 20 Ba3 Rad8 21 Rhd2 Nf4 22 Rxd7 Rxd7 23 Rxd7 Qxd7 24 b3, a draw was agreed in J.Van der Wiel-P.Carlsson, Wijk aan Zee 2008.

18 ... Red8



Black has tried to make the argument that the queen rook belongs on the d-file but mostly White keeps a slight edge. After 18 ... Rad8 19 Qf2 Rd7 20 Rd3 (20 Rd2 Red8 21 Rhd1 Bf5 22 Ng3 Be6 was a quick and altogether premature draw in N.Mamedov-T.Petrosian, Plovdiv 2008 as White should be a tad better after 23 Ne4 Bf5 24 Bb3) 20 ... Bf5 (20 ... f5 21 gxf6 Nxf6 22 Bxe6+ Rxe6 23 Rxd7 Qxd7, J.Ehlvest-H.Nakamura, Stillwater 2007 and now 24 Ng5 Bh6 25 Rd1 looks very good for White) 21 Rhd1 Red8 22 Bb3 Qb7 23 R3d2 a5 24 a4 Be6 25 Ba3 Nf4 26 Nc5 Rxd2 27 Rxd2 Rxd2 28 Qxd2 Qa7 29 Bxe6 Nxe6 30 Qd7, White has a comfortable endgame edge, S.Rublevsky-F.Corrales Jimenez, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

19 Qf2

The other queen shift 19 Qe1 does not offer White any real chances of an edge as after 19 ... Nf4!? 20 Qc3 Bd5, Black is perfectly fine.

19 ... Nf4

Black has also tried:

a) 19 ... Qb7 20 Rd2 a5 21 a4 Nf4 22 Bxe6 Nxe6 23 Bd6 Nd4 24 Rhd1 Rxd6 25 Nxd6 Qb4, and Black has equalised. The conclusion came rather quickly as after 26 Ne4 Rb8 27 c3 Nb3+ 28 Kc2 Qxa4 29 Rd8+ Rxd8 30 Rxd8+ Kh7 31 Kb1 Qa1+ 32 Kc2 Qa4 33 Kb1, a draw was agreed in M.Palac-A.Kolev, Skopje 2002.

b) 19 ... a5 20 a4 Qb7 21 b3 Kh7 22 Rd2 Nf4 was agreed drawn in T.Leviczki-V.Jianu, Arad 2010, but White should be slightly better after 23 Rxd8 Rxd8 24 Bb6 Ra8 25 Bxe6 Nxe6 26 Nd6 Qe7 27 Rd1.

20 Bb3

White has also tried 20 Bxe6 Nxe6 21 Bd6 Qa5 (or 21 ... Qb6 22 Rd2 Rd7 23 c3 Rad8 24 Rhd1 Qxf2 25 Rxf2 f5 26 gxf6 Bf8 27 Rfd2 Bh6 and a draw was agreed in A.Delchev-M.Golubev, Predeal 2006) 22 Kb1 Rd7 23 Rd2 Nd4 24 c3 Nf5 25 Rhd1 Rad8 26 Bc5 Rxd2 27 Rxd2 Nxh4?? (27 ... Rd5 is absolutely fine for Black) 28 b4 and facing the loss of material, Black resigned in L.Nisipeanu-S.Azarov, Eforie Nord 2008.

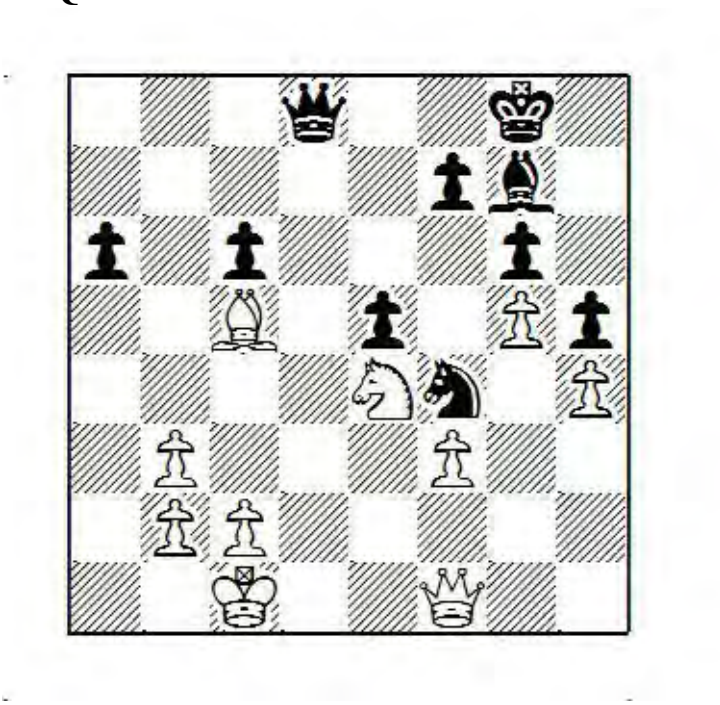
20 ... Bd5 21 Rd2 Qa5

Black has a decent alternative in 21 ... Rd7 22 Rhd1 Rad8 23 Ba3 Ne6 24 c3 Qb7 25 Qe3 Bxb3 26 axb3 Rxd2 27 Rxd2 Rxd2 28 Qxd2 Qxb3 29 Qd7 Nf4 (Black has taken over the initiative) 30 Qd8+? (White should play 30 Kb1!) 30 ... Kh7 31 Nf6+ Bxf6 32 gxf6 Nd5 33 Be7? (33 Qf8 Nxf6 just leaves Black a pawn up) 33 ... Ne3 34 Kd2 Nc4+ 35 Kd3 Nxb2+ 36 Ke2 Qc2+ and White gave up and resigned in G.Arzumanian-M.Golubev, Kharkov 2006.

22 Rhd1 Bxb3 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 24 Rxd8+ Qxd8 25 axb3 a6

Black can also consider 25 ... Qd7!? 26 Bxa7 Qh3 and he will pick up the white h-pawn.

26 Qf1



26 ... Qc8?!

I am not overly keen on this move, which seems a little more passive than necessary. Black has two decent alternatives in 26 ... Ne6 27 Bf2 Qa5 28 Kb1 Nd4 or 26 ... a5 27 Qd1 Qd5, maintaining even chances in both cases.

27 b4 Nd5

Question: It looks like Black is playing without a coherent plan. Would that be a fair observation?

Answer: Not entirely fair. Black is trying to eliminate White's slight initiative. So before he can play more actively, he has to equalise as he is not there just yet.

28 Nd6 Qa8 29 Qh3

Or 29 Qe1 Nf4 30 Qe4 Ne6 31 Bf2 Nf4 32 Nc4 with a small plus for White.

29 ... Qd8 30 c4 Nf4 31 Qc8 Qxc8 32 Nxc8 f6 33 Kd2?

After this normal-looking move, White ends up in an inferior endgame. Instead he should have opted for 33 Ne7+ Kf7 34 gxf6 Bxf6 35 Nxc6 Nd3+ 36 Kc2 Nxc5 37 bxc5 Ke6 38 b4 Bxh4 with a complex endgame, which my computer evaluates as even, but playing it out on the board will still require some precision from both sides.

33 ... fxg5 34 hxg5 Bf8 35 Ke3?

Now Black wins rather quickly. However, also insufficient is 35 Bxf8 Kxf8 36 Nd6 h4 37 Ne4 h3 38 Ng3 Ke7 and while the material situation is even, Black is winning due to White's knight being stuck defending against the advance of the h-pawn.

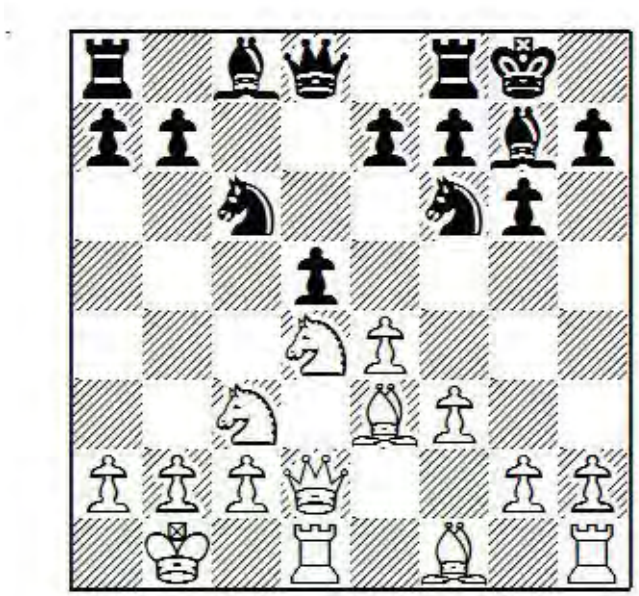
35 ... h4 36 Bxf8

Also, 36 Kf2 does not help either and after 36 ... Bxc5+ 37 bxc5 Kf7 38 Nd6+ Ke6, the black knight will start picking off White's pawns.

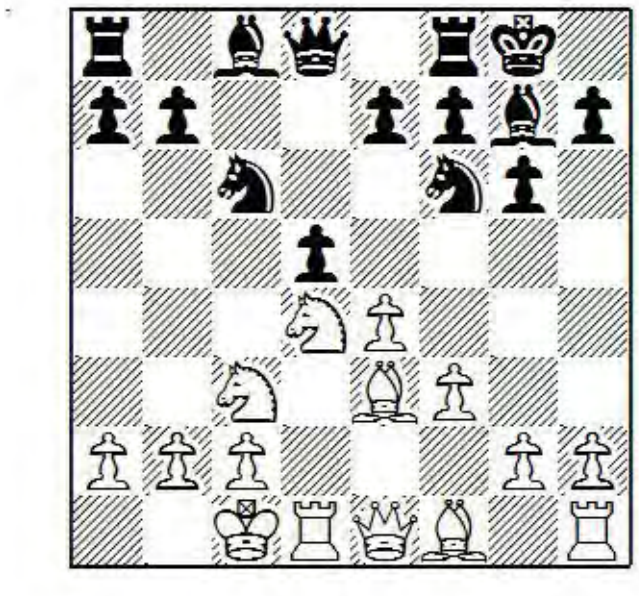
36 ... h3 37 Bd6 h2 38 Ne7+ Kf7 0-1

Chapter Six
Yugoslav Attack without Bc4: 9 0-0-0 d5 – 10 Kb1 and 10 Qe1

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 Kb1



10 Qe1



These two moves are both relative recent discoveries, if you consider the last 25 years as recent. Both moves pull the game away from the standard lines that we covered in the previous chapter.

The first move, 10 Kb1 was introduced in 1993 and looks completely counter-intuitive, but it has so many interesting tactical points that it immediately gained a considerable following. The fact that we have

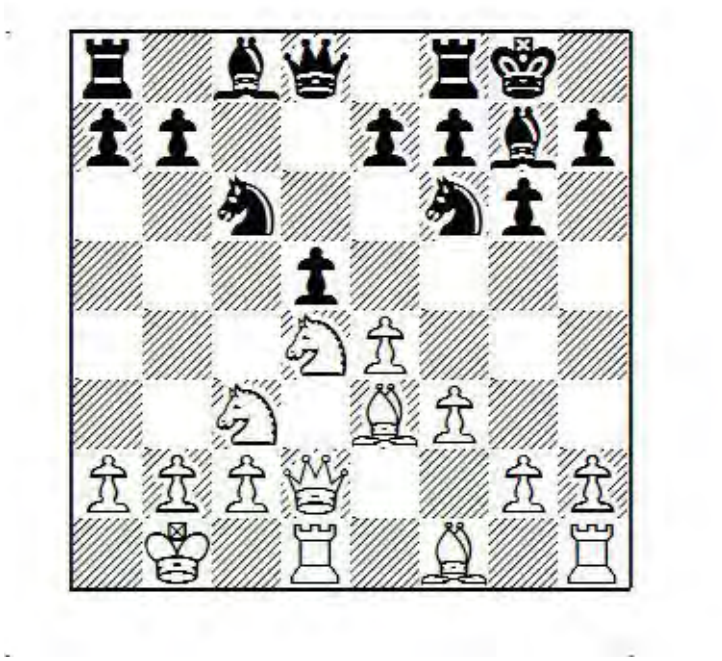
several games featuring the very best players in the world is evidence of that.

In Game 33, Carlsen answers with the clever 'waiting move' 10 ... Rb8, and is soon rewarded. The main point behind 10 Kb1 is seen in Game 34, when Black captures with 10 ... Nxd4 and runs into 11 e5!, which leads to very sharp play.

For some time, 10 Qe1 gave Black real headaches, mainly because it seemed that all the typical responses did not provide Black with the standard counterplay. It is now clear that Black will be okay, but Black really needs to know what he is doing. In Game 35, Black strikes in the centre with the logical-looking 10 ... e5, whereas the less-forcing, but very sharp option 10 ... e6 is the subject of Game 36.

Game 33
L.Nisipeanu-M.Carlsen
Medias 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 Kb1



This move was introduced by the Swiss grandmaster Milov in 1993.

Question: Why is White ditching a tempo by moving the king without being provoked, say by a ... Qa5 sally?

10 ... Rb8

The main line is 10 ... Nxd4 11 e5! which we will cover in the next game.

Answer: The tactical justification is that 10 ... dxe4?? does not work at all. After 11 Nxc6 Qxd2, because this capture does not come with a check (due to the white king being on the b1-square instead), Black ends up a piece down after 12 Nxe7+ Kh8 13 Bxd2. Moreover, it also doesn't hurt for White to have a safer king. In essence, 10 Kb1 is directed at taking advantage of Black's typical freeing ... d6-d5 break.

11 Ndb5

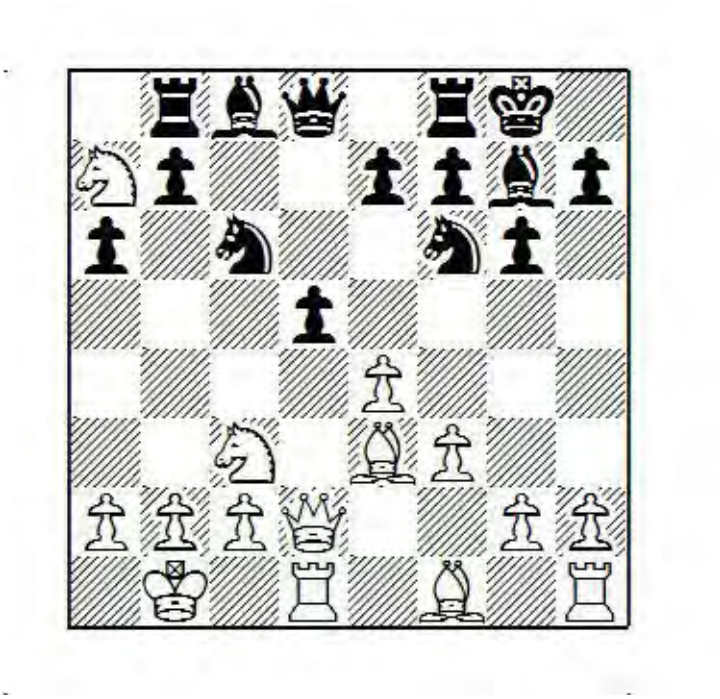
After our main game was played, the entire line with Kb1 has been played considerably in fewer games. It is probably safe to say that 11 Ndb5 is not the answer for White to secure an advantage either, so let us take a quick look at the two of the alternatives at this point:

a) 11 Be2 is an interesting move. It looks harmless but may be playable. For instance, 11 ... e5 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 exd5 cxd5 14 Nxd5 Nxd5 15 Qxd5 Qf6 16 Qa5 Bf5 17 g4 Bxc2+! 18 Kxc2 Qc6+ 19 Kb1? (19 Qc5 Qa4+ 20 Kb1 Rfc8 forces 21 Bb5 Qxb5 22 Qxb5 Rxb5 23 Rd2 a6 with approximately equal chances) 19 ... e4 20 Bd4 exf3 21 Bxg7 fxe2 22 Bxf8 Qe4+ 23 Ka1 exd1Q+ 24 Rxd1 Qxg4 25 Re1 Rxf8 26 Qxa7 Qf4 has Black maintaining the initiative, D.Kanovsky-S.Azarov, Czechia 2012.

b) 11 Nb3 dxe4 12 Qxd8 (or 12 Qc1 Qe8 13 Nxe4 Nxe4 14 fxe4 b6, and Black has equalised) 12 ... Rxd8 13 Rxd8+ Nxd8 14 Bxa7 Ra8 15 Bb6 Bf5 16 g4 (16 Bb5 exf3 17 gxf3 Nc6!? 18 Bxc6 bxc6 19 Bd4 Nd5 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Ne4 e5 22 Nbc5 f6! gives more or less equal chances in the endgame, F.Jenni-

S.Berndt, Germany 2003 and Black intends ... g6-g5, ... Kg6 and h7-h5 with good prospects) 16 ... Be6 17 fxe4 Bxb3 (17 ... Nd7!? 18 Bxd8 Rxd8 leaves Black with excellent compensation for the pawn) 18 axb3 Nxg4 19 Be2 Ne5 20 b4 Ndc6 gives roughly equal chances, S.Nitin-D.Rogozenco, Moscow 2012.

11 ... a6 12 Na7



Question: What is White doing? This looks completely crazy.

Answer: This move obviously looks rather strange, but this has been established as an acceptable line by theory. In fact, my computer even evaluates the position as better for White. Of course at the moment, the knight is guarded by a bishop and it can be exchanged with the c8-bishop, so White just has to make sure that this does not change.

12 ... e6 13 g4

White has some of alternatives here, with a couple deserving a bit more than a fleeting glance:

a) 13 exd5 exd5 (13 ... Nxd5 14 Nxd5 exd5 15 Nxc8 Rxc8 is also fine for Black) 14 Nxc8 Rxc8 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Qxd5 Qxd5 17 Rxd5 Nb4 18 Rc5 Rce8 19 Bd2 Rd8 20 Bd3 and a draw was agreed in F.Caruana-D.Smerdon, Budapest 2007.

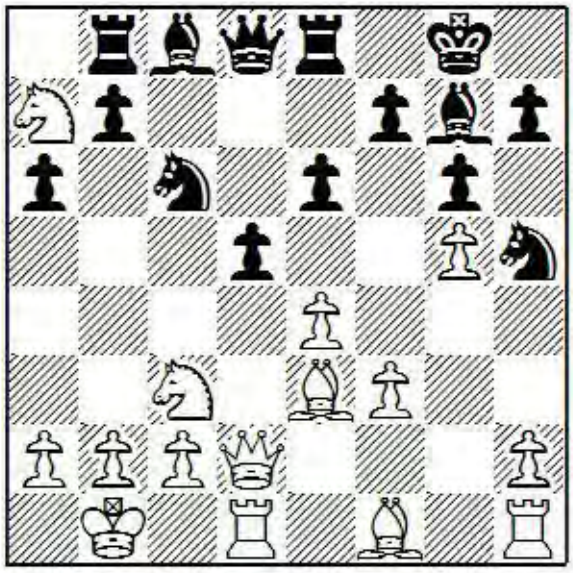
b) 13 h4 Bd7 14 Nxc6 (if White has to enter this position, then I think he has been heading down the wrong path as Black is fully developed with the b8-rook staring at the b1-king dead in the eyes) 14 ... bxc6 15 Bh6 Bxh6 (my computer recommends the gutsy 15 ... d4 16 Ne2 Rxb2+ 17 Kxb2 Qb6+ 18 Kc1 Rb8 19 Qg5 Bxh6 20 Qxh6 and now 20 ... c5! 21 h5 Ba4 22 Nxd4 Qb2+ 23 Kd2 cxd4 24 Bd3 Qc3+ 25 Ke2 Rb2 gives Black enough for the exchange as with perpetual checks hanging around the corner) 16 Qxh6 Nh5 17 g4 Ng3 18 Rh3 Nxf119 Rxf1 d4 20 Nd1 e5 21 Rh2 (21 h5 g5 22 Qd6 Re8 can only be better for Black as the white attack has come to a standstill, while Black is ready to go skull-bashing on the queenside) 21 ... Be6 22 g5 d3 23 h5 Rb7 24 b3 dxc2+ 25 Kxc2 was I.Popov-R.Mamedov, Moscow 2013, and now 25 ... Bxb3+! 26 axb3 Qb6 was simplest as the white king cannot get away.

13 ... Re8!

Question: What is the point behind this move? The e-file is not open so why put the rook there?

Answer: Black is readying himself for the inevitable opening up of the centre. Nimzowitsch called this type of move the “mysterious rook move”. Grandmaster Rogozenco, who observed the game live, reported that this move apparently surprised Nisipeanu who now started spending a lot of time without being able to find a good plan.

14 g5 Nh5



15 Bf2?!

A very artificial move, but then again, White's previous moves been likewise; 10 Kb1, 11 Ndb5 and 12 Na7, for instance. One of the problems for White is that the a7-knight is really showing signs of being stuck, with 15 ... d4 hanging in the air. Ironically, even after 15 Nxc8 d4 16 Bf2 dxc3 (16 ... Rxc8 17 Ne2 Qc7 18 Ng3 Nf4 is also pleasant for Black) 17 Qxd8 Rxd8 18 Rxd8+ Nxd8 19 Na7 cxb2, the knight is still in a7-dreamland.

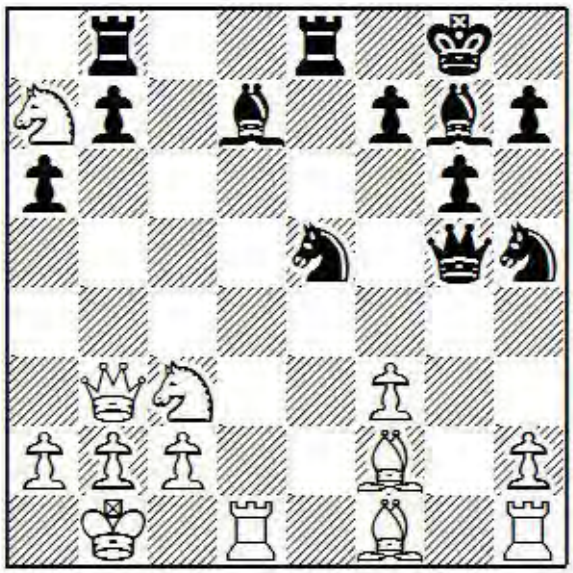
15 ... Bd7! 16 exd5 exd5 17 Qxd5?

Nisipeanu had played the opening very ambitiously, seemingly as if he has an advantage. In fact, he is in already pretty bad shape. Rogozenco here offers 17 Nxd5 Be6 18 c4 (18 Nxc6? bxc6 19 Nb6 Bd5! is even worse) 18 ... Bf5+ 19 Ka1 Ra8 20 Nxc6 bxc6 21 Nc3 Qa5 22 Ne4 Rad8 23 Bd3 Qe5 with an uncomfortable position for White.

17 ... Ne5 18 Qb3

White jettisons the g5-pawn to gain time, but it does not work either. Rogozenco suggests 18 h4 but after 18 ... Qc7 19 Qd6 Qxd6 20 Rxd6 Bf5 21 Rd1 Nxf3, White is struggling to stay in the game.

18 ... Qxg5



If we're just counting points, then Black has just managed to equalise. But looking at the position on the board, White is in serious trouble. All of Black's pieces are developed and well-coordinated while White's pieces are spread randomly across the board. The marooned a7-knight is making a particularly interesting impression at this point. Furthermore, White's pawn structure is a royal mess.

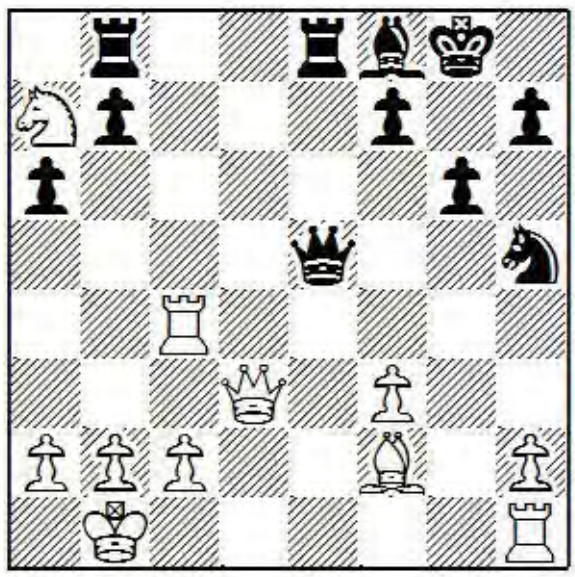
19 Ne4 Qf4 20 Be2 Be6 21 Qa3 Nc4 22 Bxc4 Bxc4 23 Nd6 Bf8 24 Rd4 Qe5

Also, 24 ... Qg5!? with the idea of 25 Rxc4? Qg2! is also very good for Black.

25 Rxc4 Bxd6

Rogozenco offers the following lines: 25 ... Qe2! 26 Qc3 (or 26 Qd3 Qxf2 27 Nxe8 Rxe8 28 Rd4 Nf4 29 Qd2 Ne2) 26 ... Bxd6 27 Bd4 Bxh2 and Black is winning.

26 Qd3 Bf8!



Black's pieces are wonderfully coordinated, whereas White's forces look randomly scattered across the board.

27 a4 Rbd8 28 Qb3 Qd5 29 Rc3 Qd2 30 Be3?

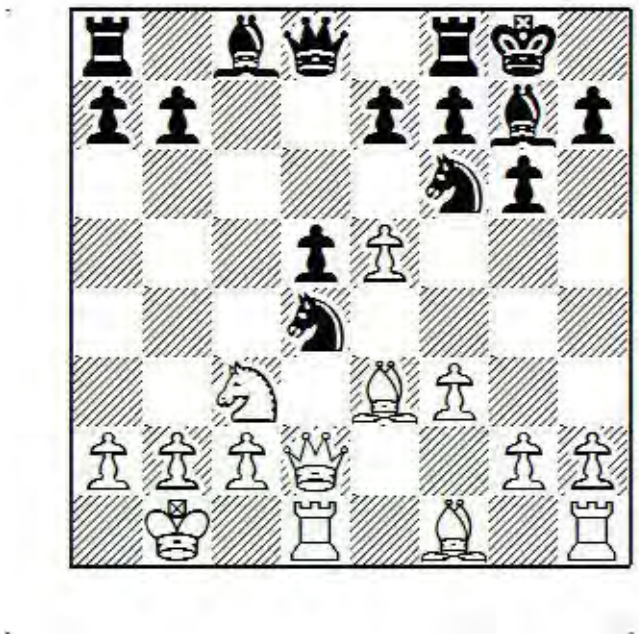
For White to stay in the game, he should have opted for 30 Rc7 Re6 31 Bb6, although Black here too has the better chances.

30 ... Qe2 31 Bb6? Rd1+ 0-1

White resigned on account of 31 ... Rd1+ 32 Rxd1 Qxd1+ 33 Ka2 Re1 34 Qc4 Qa1+ 35 Kb3 Rb1 and he will start losing material at a rapid pace before getting mated.

Game 34
L.Nisipeanu-T.Radjabov
Bazna 2009

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 Kb1 Nxd4 11 e5!



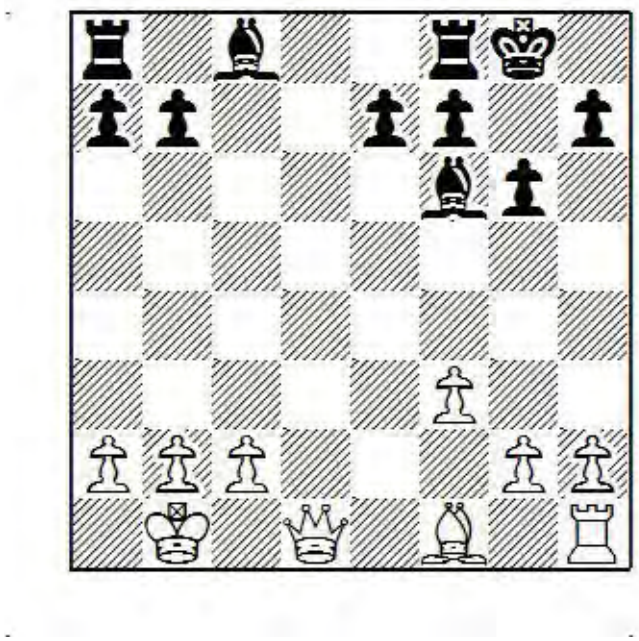
Question: Did Black not just capture a piece on d4?

Answer: This is one of tactical justifications for the previous move. White does not recapture the piece, but rather threatens the knight on f6 so one of the knights has to drop anyway.

11 ... Nf5 12 exf6 exf6

Question: Why does Black recapture with the pawn instead of keeping the kingside pawn structure intact?

Answer: This has been established as Black's primary response. Recapturing on f6 with the bishop is considerably more risky, but has seen reasonable results following 12 ... Bxf6 13 Nxd5! Qxd5! 14 Qxd5 Nxe3 15 Qd2 Nxd1 16 Qxd1.



However, I am somewhat sceptical of this line and think that White enjoys excellent winning chances. After 16 ... Be6, White has two main choices:

a) 17 Bd3 was played in the first game I originally saw with this line, M.Adams-V.Ivanchuk, Dortmund 1998 and following 17 ... Rfd8 18 Qe1 Rd6 19 Qa5 b6 20 Qe1 Rc8 21 a3 Rc5 22 g4 Rcd5 23 Qg3 h5 24 h3 h4 25 Qf2 Rxd3! 26 cxd3 Rxd3, and despite only having a bishop pair and a pawn for the queen, Black is doing fine.

b) The strange-looking 17 Bb5 (with the simple idea of transferring it to the b3-square to eliminate

Black's bishop pair) has been tested with:

b1) 17 ... a6 18 Ba4 b5 19 Bb3 Bxb3 20 axb3 a5 and now White introduces an interesting idea to that sees to knock the legs off Black's counterplay with 21 Ka2!?.

The king will be advancing to the third rank to secure his own fortress and subsequently be involved in creating a passed pawn in the future!

After 21 ... a4, White has two good choices:

b11) 22 b4 Rfc8 23 Ka3 Rd8 24 Qe2 Rd5 25 Rd1 Rad8 26 Rxd5 Rxd5 27 f4 h5 28 g3 e6 29 h3 Kg7 30 c3 Kg8 31 Qe4, and White has stabilised the situation, and is now just waiting for the right time to play c3-c4, Lu Shanglei-V.Jianu, Bazna 2014.

b12) With 22 Qe2, we reach a position that has been recommended as a weapon by Dzindzhichashvili. One of the ideas is that if Black exchanges on b3, then the king will be self-sufficient there and cannot be attacked. This frees White's queen and rook up to set up a kingside attack. For example, 22 ... Rfc8 23 Rd1 Ra7 24 f4 e6 25 g4 Rac7 26 Rd2 axb3+ 27 Kxb3 Rc4 28 Qf3 R8c7 29 Qf1 Be7 30 c3 R4c5 31 Qe2 h5 32 h3 Kg7 33 Qe4 has Black clearly on the defensive, B.Feldborg-G.Halldarsson, correspondence 2006.

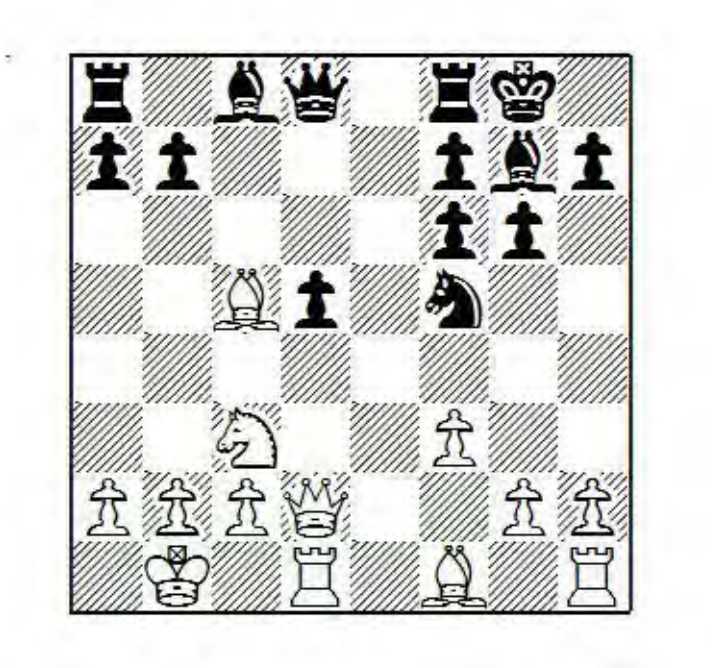
b2) 17 ... Rfd8 is definitely the better option and after 18 Qe2, Black can consider:

b21)18 ... Rd6 19 Rd1 Rad8 20 Rxd6 Rxd6 21 g3 (or 21 a4!? a6 22 Bc4 Bd7 23 Bb3 e6 24 c3 Bc6 25 f4 h5 26 g3 Rd7 27 Bc2 a5 28 Ka2 Bd5+ 29 Bb3 Bc6 30 h4 and while Black eventually succeeded in holding the draw, it was a long torturous effort that few players will enjoy, K.Malinovsky-M.Petr, Pardubice 2014) 21 ... Bd7 22 Bxd7 Rxd7 23 f4 h6 24 c3 Rd6 25 Kc2 a5 26 a3 b6 27 h4 Kg7 28 a4 g5 29 hxg5 hxg5 30 Qb5 gxf4 31 gxf4 Re6 32 Qd3 Rd6 33 Qb5 and again Black has to defend a sad-looking endgame, T.Hansen-F.Corrales Jimenez, Roquetas de Mar 2011.

b22) 18 ... a6 19 Ba4 Rd4 20 Bb3 Bxb3 21 axb3 Rad8 22 g4 g5 23 Qe3 R8d5 was played in F.Slingerland-D.Vocaturo, Hoogeveen 2010. White should have continued 24 Rf1 (instead of the complicated 24 h4 gxh4 25 f4 which he decided on) 24 ... Rd2 25 f4 h6 26 fxg5 hxg5 27 Rf5 with clearly better chances in the ensuing endgame.

13 Bc5

In a top gun encounter from 2013, White tried 13 Nxd5 which is considered fairly innocuous, but possibly it should not be dismissed so quickly. After 13 ... Nxe3 (13 ... Be6 14 Bc5 Bxd5 15 Qxd5 Qxd5 16 Rxd5 Rfd8 17 Bc4 promises White a tiny edge) 14 Qxe3 Be6 15 Bc4 f5 16 Nc3 Qe7 17 Bxe6 fxe6 18 Rhe1 Rfe8 19 Nb5 Qb4 20 Qb3 Qxb3 21 axb3 Re7 22 c4 a6, Black had equalised, D.Andreikin-A.Morozevich, Moscow 2013.



13 ... d4

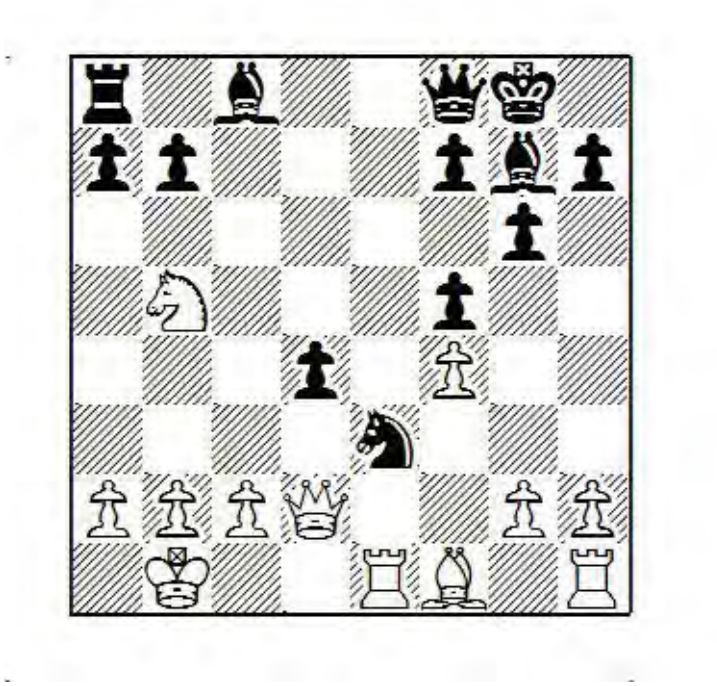
Avoiding the exchange sacrifice with 13 ... Re8 merely runs into 14 Nxd5 Bd7 15 g4 Bc6 16 Bc4 Nd6

17 Bb3 with a clear advantage for White, D.Mitrovic-P.Cukanovic, Serbia 2008.

14 Bxf8 Qxf8 15 Nb5 Ne3 16 Re1

White has also tried guarding the c-pawn, which is a direct target of Black's, but it hardly represents a critical test of Black's opening. For instance, 16 Rc1 Bh6 17 Qxd4 (17 f4!? Bxf4 18 Qxd4 Bh6 19 Nc7 Rb8 20 Qxa7 Bd7 21 Re1?! Qd8 22 Bb5 Qxc7 23 Bxd7 Qxc2+ 24 Ka1 Rd8 was tested in M.Paragua-Lu Shanglei, Ho Chi Minh City 2012, and here White should probably have tried 25 Rxe3 Rxd7 26 Ree1 Bf4, which is still uncomfortable but White is still in the game) 17 ... Nf5 18 Qc3 (18 Qf2 Be3 19 Qe1 Bxc1 20 Qxc1 Bd7 21 Nc3 Re8 22 Bd3 Qd6 23 Ne4 was played in D.Kanovsky-J.Geller, Pardubice 2013, and here 23 ... Qe5 24 Nc3 Bc6 would leave Black with the more comfortable position) 18 ... Bxc1 19 Kxc1 Bd7 20 Bd3 Rc8 21 Qd2 Bxb5 22 Bxb5 Qc5 23 Bd3 Ne3 and Black has the initiative, although it is hardly any kind of significant advantage we are talking about, N.Short-M.Carlsen, London 2009.

16 ... f5 17 f4!



An interesting attempt to fight for the advantage by stopping the ... f5-f4 advance. Now, in order to hold the balance, very precise play from Black is required. Radjabov was up to the task. Another try is 17 Nxd4 f4 (Black's strong minor pieces secure sufficient compensation for the exchange) 18 g3 Qd8 19 Nb3 (19 c3 loses to 19 ... Bxd4 followed by a check with the bishop on f5) 19 ... Qf6 20 Qc1 Bf5 21 Bd3 Bxd3! (21 ... Rc8 22 Bxf5 Qxf5 23 Re2 a5 24 Rhe1 a4 25 gxf4 axb3 and a draw was agreed in K.Akshayraj-S.Ganguly, Mangalore 2008 though White has the advantage after 26 axb3) 22 cxd3 Qf5 23 Rxe3 fxe3 24 Qxe3 Qb5 and Black has adequate compensation for the pawn.

17 ... Qc5 18 c3 Nxf1 19 Re8+

Instead, 19 Rhxf1?? runs into 19 ... Qxb5 and Black is winning. The queen guards the e8-square while ... dxc3 is threatened with devastating effect.

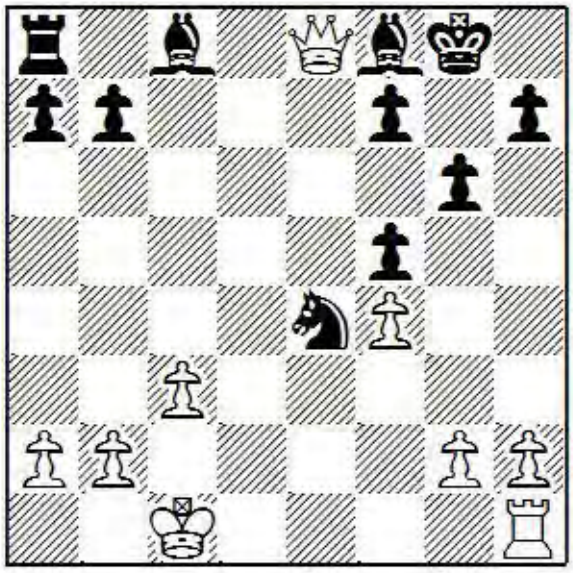
19 ... Bf8 20 Qxd4 Qxb5 21 Qd8 Nd2+ 22 Kc2 Qa4+

Similar to our main game is 22 ... Qxe8 23 Qxe8 Ne4 24 Rd1 Nf6 25 Qd8, K.Landa-D.Vocaturo, Reggio Emilia 2010. Now 25 ... Kg7 26 Qc7 Be6 27 Qxb7 Re8 28 Qxa7 is not easy for Black.

23 Kc1

Also possible is 23 Kxd2 Qxf4+ 24 Kd1! Qh6 25 Rhe1! f4 26 R1e2! (26 Rxf8+?? Qxf8 27 Re8 runs into 27 ... Bg4+ and it is game over) 26 ... b6 27 Qd5 Rb8 28 Qd6 Ra8 29 Qc6 Rb8 30 Rxc8 Rxc8 31 Qxc8 Qxh2 32 Qc6 with a complicated position and interesting material distribution.

23 ... Qxe8 24 Qxe8 Ne4



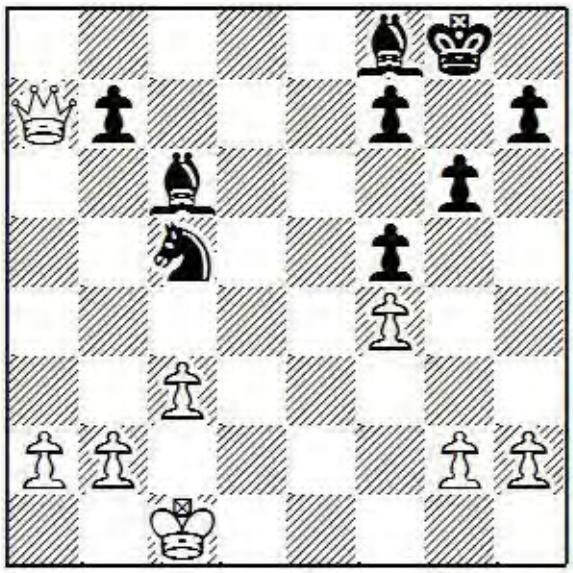
25 Rd1 Nf6 26 Qe5 Nd7 27 Qe8 Nf6 28 Qd8 Ne4!

The perfect square for the knight.

29 Rd7?!

Leaving Black no choice but to head into an endgame with queen against three minor pieces. Objectively speaking, chances should be about equal. However, White, in particular, has the opportunity to go wrong and lose a couple of pawns, especially those on the kingside. An alternative to the text move is 29 g3!?, intending to keep Black tied down. But Black will eventually be able to free himself if he is patient, for example with 29 ... a6 30 Qc7 Nc5 31 Rd5 Ne6 32 Qb6 h5 33 h4 Be7 34 Kc2 Kf8 35 a4 Ke8 and Black holds the position without any problems.

29 ... Bxd7 30 Qxa8 Bc6 31 Qxa7 Nc5



White won a pawn after exchanging rooks, but this represents no real problems for Black.

32 g3 Nd3+ 33 Kb1!?

Rogozenco mentions that after 33 Kc2 Be4 34 Kb3 Bc5 35 Qb8+ Kg7 36 Qd8 Black can threaten mate with 36 ... b5!?, but White simply runs away with 37 Kc2 Nxf4+ 38 Kd2 Nd3 39 Qb8 Bg1. though of course, only Black can be better in this endgame.

33 ... Be4 34 Ka1 Bc5 35 Qb8+ Kg7 36 Qd8 Bg1 37 h4 h5 38 a4 Bf2 39 a5 Bxg3

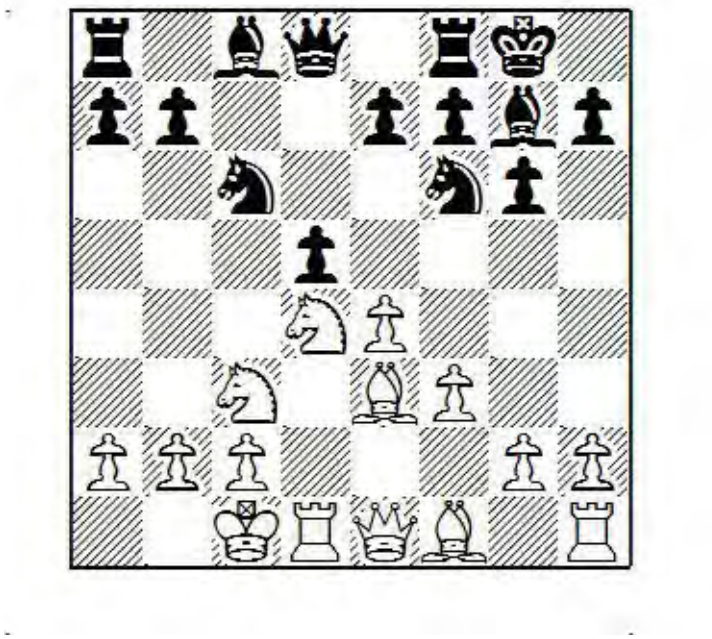
Vigorito suggests that Black should try 39 ... Ne1!?, so that after 40 Qd6 Nf3, Black controls the d4- and e5-squares, thus avoiding any perpetual checks, before snacking on the kingside pawns. It sounds like a good idea.

40 Qd4+ Kf8 41 Qd8+ ½-½

White is forced to repeat the moves before Black picks up more pawns and start pushing them forward. A fascinating battle.

Game 35
F.Caruana-R.Mamedov
Plovdiv 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Nc3 cxd4 5 Nxd4 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 Qe1

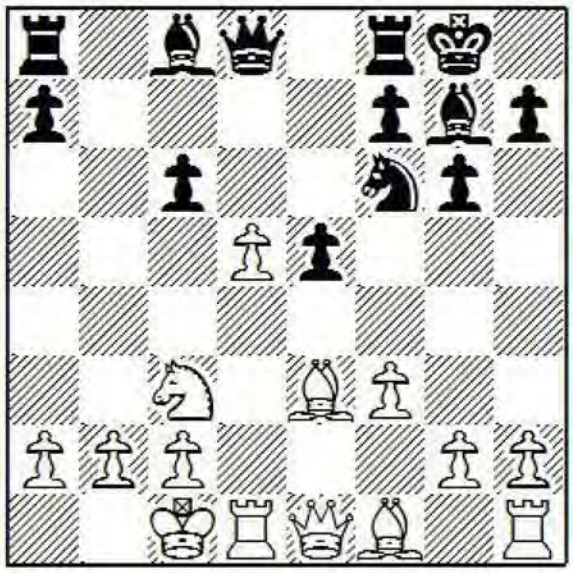


As far as I'm aware, this move is the brainchild of Semyon Dvoirys who introduced the move in the late eighties. It has some practical ideas that we will discuss below, that are aimed against Black's standard set-ups in this variation. In addition, it moves the queen away from the d-file so that Black's queen is directly opposed by a white rook. Finally, in many lines, White swings the queen to h4 to take part in an attack on Black's king.

10 ... e5

This is the established main line. We will discuss 10 ... e6 in Game 36.

11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 exd5



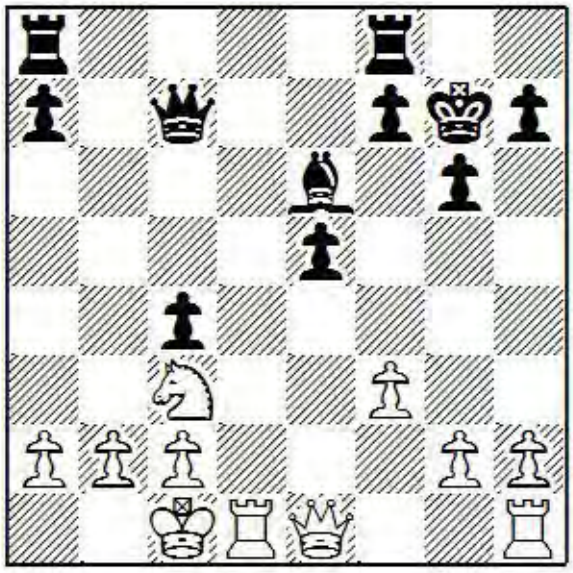
12 ... Nxd5

Question: Why does Black not simply recapture with the pawn? His centre would look amazing, won't it?

Answer: Even though it looks terribly appealing, 12 ... cxd5 is not played as often as the recapture with the knight. There are very good reasons for this, the primary and most important one is that Black needs to be very careful not to lose one of the pawns right away: 13 Bg5 (13 Bc4? d4 does not lose a piece for White, but it definitely gives Black a solid advantage after 14 Bg5 Qc7 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Ne4 Bg7) 13 ... Be6 (13 ... Qb6 has also been played, but it is not nearly as good as the main line after 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Nxd5 Qg5+ which was played in L.Perpinya Rofes-A.Martin Gonzalez, Spain 1998, and now White's best is 16 Kb1 e4 17 Qxe4 Rb8 18 b3 Be6 19 Qe3 Qh4 20 g3 Qd8 21 Bc4 and Black's dark square dominance is insufficient compensation for the two pawns deficit) and now:

a) White should avoid the temptation of the unprotected central pawn as Black obtains plenty of compensation after 14 Qxe5 h6 15 Bh4 g5 16 Be1 Nh5 (or 16 ... Ne4!? 17 Qxe4 dxe4 18 Rxd8 Rfxd8 19 Nxe4 Bxa2 20 b3 Rac8 21 Bc4 Rxc4 22 bxc4 Bxc4 leaves Black with the slightly better chances on account of the bishop pair) 17 Qe2 Rb8 with ample compensation for Black.

b) 14 Bc4 Qc7 (or 14 ... Qb6 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nxd5 Bxd5 17 Rxd5, J.Lopez Martinez-T.Hansen, San Sebastian 2012, and now Vigorito offers 17 ... e4 18 Rb5 Qc7 19 Qxe4, but as he pointed out, Black does not have quite enough compensation for two pawns) 15 Bxf6 dxc4 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 and here we have a whole handful of alternatives to look at:



b1) 17 Qe3 Rab8 18 Rhe1 f6 19 Ne4 Rb6 20 Nc5 Rc8 21 Nxe6+ Rxe6 22 Qc3 Rd6 23 Rxd6 Qxd6, and a draw was agreed in M.Mueller-S.Berndt, Germany 1998.

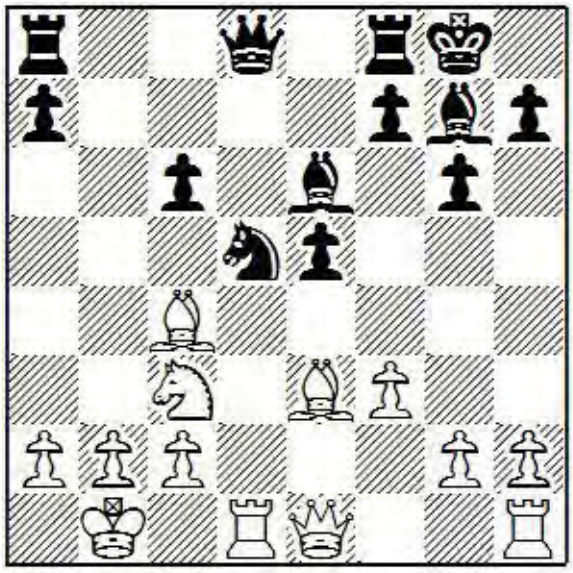
b2) 17 Ne4 Rad8 18 Qc3 Bd5 19 Rhe1 f6 20 Nf2 Qb6 21 Rd2 Bf7 gives Black the initiative, although of course it will take a bit more than that to decide the game, M.Borriss-S.Berndt, Germany 1998.

b3) 17 h4 Rab8 18 Ne4 f6?! (this is too passive in this position and instead, 18 ... h5 19 Qc3 Rb5 20 Rhe1 f6 21 Rd6 Qe7 offers even chances) 19 g4 Rb5 20 h5 g5 21 h6+ Kg8 22 Rd6 Rb6? (22 ... Qe7 23 Qc3 is also very nice for White) 23 Qa5! (all of a sudden, Black's position collapses) 23 ... Kf7 24 Rhd1 Rc6? 25 Nxg5+! fxg5 26 Qxe5 Qc8 27 Qg7+ Ke8 28 Rd8+ and the game is over, Yu Yangyi-Pham Chuong, Kazan 2013.

b4) 17 Nd5 Bxd5 18 Rxd5 Rfe8 19 Qc3 Kg8 (or 19 ... Rad8 20 Rhd1 Rxd5 21 Rxd5 Kg8 22 b3 as played in T.Bakre-G.Hernandez, Roque Saenz Pena 1997, and now Vigorito's suggestion of 22 ... Qb6!? seems to keep Black in business) 20 Qa5 Qe7 21 Re1 Qg5+ 22 Qd2 Qf6 23 Re4 was M.Parligras-R.Milu, Romania 1999, and now Vigorito again suggests 23 ... Qb6. One possible continuation is 24 Rdxe5 Rxe5 25 Rxe5 Qg1+ 26 Re1 Qxh2 27 g4 Qc7 (27 ... Qxd2+ 28 Kxd2 is not an easy endgame to defend) 28 Qc3 Qc6 29 Re4 Rc8 and while White is better, Black should, with careful defence, be able to get away with half a point.

13 Bc4 Be6 14 Ne4

Relatively recently, 14 Kb1 has started seeing some action.



White intends to make the claim that Black does not have any useful moves:

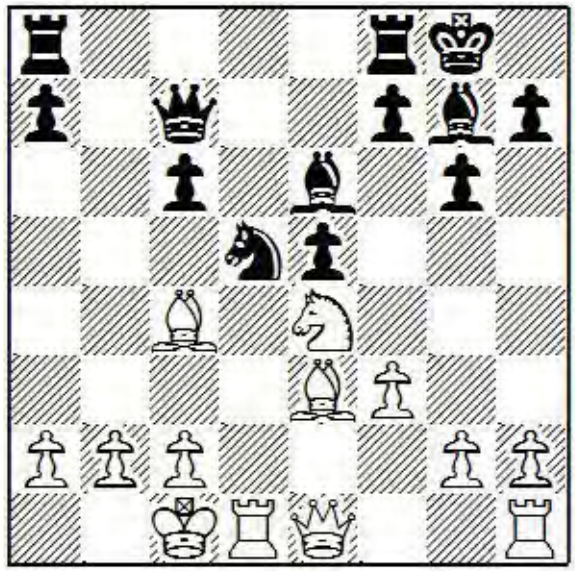
a) After 14 ... Rb8 (Black has also tried 14 ... Re8 15 Ne4 a5 16 h4 h6 17 Qd2 Kh7 18 h5 gxh5 19 Bd3 is already quite good for White, G.Popilski-R.Polzin, Paleochora 2013, whereas 14 ... Qd7!? is an untested option) 15 Ne4, Black has played:

a1) 15 ... f5 16 Ng5 (16 Bxa7!?) 16 ... Bc8 17 h4 h6 18 Ne4 Be6 19 Nc5 Bf7 20 Na6 Rb7 21 Bb3 Qf6 22 Nc5 Re7 23 c3 Rfe8 24 Qd2 Nxe3 25 Qxe3 Bxb3 26 axb3 and White is more comfortable, R.Edouard-G.Jones, London 2014.

a2) 15 ... Qc7 16 Bc5 Rfd8 17 g4 a5 (or 17 ... h6 18 h4 f5 19 gxf5 gxf5 20 Ng3 Qf7 21 Bb3 Rd7 22 Qa5 Rbd8 23 Rd3 as in Wei Yi-S.Gagare, Chongqing 2013 and now 23 ... Kh7 looks like a good option when the chances are about even) 18 h4 h6 19 g5 h5 20 a4 Qb7 21 b3 Ra8 22 Kc1 Qc7 23 Qf2 Rd7 24 Rd2 Nf4 25 Bd6 Qd8 26 Bxe6 Nxe6 27 Rhd1 and while White's advantage is small, it is also obvious that he is clearly in control, Wei Yi-R.Yankovsky, Las Vegas 2013.

b) Finally, 14 Bc5? is a matter of poor timing as after 14 ... Qg5+! 15 Kb1 Nxc3+ 16 Qxc3 e4 17 Bd4 Bxd4 18 Qxd4 Bxc4 19 Qxc4 e3 20 Qe2 Rad8 21 h4 Qe5, Black is left with a clearly better position, J.Estrada Nieto-E.Kahn, Budapest 1995.

14 ... Qc7



This is the most natural square for the queen, paving the way for the f8-rook to head for the d8-square. Recent results with this, however, have been pretty disappointing for Black. Perhaps Black might consider the alternatives:

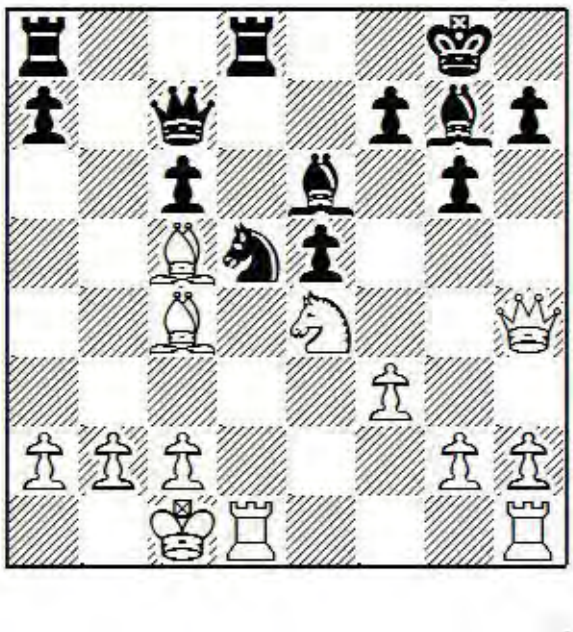
a) 14 ... Re8 15 g4 Qc7 (this position can also transpose from 14 ... Qc7 and then 15 ... Re8) 16 Bc5 Nf4 17 Bd6 Qb6 18 Bc5 Qc7 19 Bd6 (White is happy with a draw) 19 ... Qc8 (however, Black is not agreeable to a truce) 20 Bxe6 Qxe6 21 Kb1 f5 22 gxf5 gxf5 23 Nc5 Qf7 24 Qh4 Rad8 25 Rhg1 Kh8 and White is at best fractionally better, R.Nanjo-N.Grandelius, Tromso 2014.

b) 14 ... Qc8 15 Bc5 Rd8 16 Qh4 (White has an interesting try in 16 Qa5!? to press on the queenside squares) 16 ... h6 17 g4 Qc7 18 g5 h5 19 Qf2 Qa5 (19 ... Nf4!? 19 Bxe6 Nxe6 20 Bd6 Qa5 21 Kb1 Rd7 22 Rd2 Rad8 23 Rhd1 was D.Karatorossian-S. Farago, Budapest 1997, and Black can consider 23 ... Qb5!? with the idea of advancing ... c5-c4) 20 Qe1 Qc7 21 Qf2 Qa5 22 Bd6? (this leads to trouble for White and instead 22 a3! is perhaps a tiny bit better for White) 22 ... Rxd6! 23 Nxd6 Qb4 24 Bb3 Qxd6 25 c4 a5 26 cxd5 cxd5 27 Qd2 Qb6 28 Kb1 a4 29 Bxd5 Rd8 and White resigned in G.Sax-G.Mohr, Maribor 2000.

15 Bc5 Rfd8

It seems to make the most sense to place the rook on the d-file where it prevents White from playing Bd6 or Nd6. Nevertheless, Black has also played 15 ... Rfe8 (once again, this may arise from 14 ... Re8 and 15 ... Qc7) 16 h4 h6 17 g4 Rad8 18 g5 (White can consider the waiting safety move 18 Kb1!? to see if Black will weaken his king with ... f7-f5) 18 ... h5 19 Qf2 Rd7 20 Bb3 (20 Rd2 followed by Rhd1 also looks like a good idea) 20 ... a5 21 a4 Rb8 22 Rd3 Nf4 23 Rxd7 Qxd7 was A.Galkin-A.Timofeev, Elista 2001, and now 24 Bxe6 Qxe6 25 Kb1 Nd5 26 b3 would have promised White a small advantage due to Black's somewhat weaker pawns.

16 Qh4



The standard plan for White, who intends to follow-up with g4-g5 and possibly Nf6+.

Another relevant, but decidedly less dangerous option is the aggressive-looking 16 h4 h6 17 h5 (or 17 g4 Rd7 18 g5 h5 19 Qf2 Rad8 20 Bb3 Qa5 21 a3 as in J.Lopez Martinez-A.Gonzalez Perez, Vallfogona de Balaguer 2013, and here Black can obtain a good game with 21 ... Nf4!? 22 Bxe6 Nxe6 23 Rxd7 Rxd7) 17 ... f5 18 Nf2 Nf4 19 Bxe6+ Nxe6 20 Bb4 g5 21 Bc3 Rxd1+ 22 Nxd1 Nf4 23 Ne3 Qf7 24 Kb1 Nd5 and Black had the initiative and was soon better in E.Inarkiev-T.Radjabov, Elista 2008.

16 ... Qa5

The main line is 16 ... h6 and after 17 g4, Black has several options available. Some of these are:

a) 17 ... Rd7 18 g5 h5 19 Rd2 (19 Nf6+ Nxf6 20 Bxe6 Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 was R.Mainka-S.Lindemann, Oberwart 1991, with 21 ... Rd8 22 Rxd8+ Qxd8 23 Bc4 Nd5 deemed equal by Schulz and now 24 Bxa7 can be answered by 24 ... Bh6! 25 Kb1 Bxg5 with an interesting endgame) 19 ... Rad8 20 Rhd1 Nf4 21 Bxe6 Rxd2 22 Rxd2 Rxd2 23 Nxd2 (23 Kxd2?! Nxe6 24 c3 was played in T.Luther-T.Tolnai, Budapest 1992, and now Black could have taken solid control of the game with 24 ... Qb7 25 Kc2 Qb5 26 Qf2 Qa4+ 27 Kd2 Qxa2 and Black is clearly better) 23 ... Nxe6 24 Be3 e4!? (in my opinion, this is an unnecessary pawn sacrifice to open for bishop and instead 24 ... Nf4 25 Qf2 Ne6 looks perfectly fine for Black) 25 Nxe4 Qe5 (another option is 25 ... Qa5 26 a4 Nd4 27 Bxd4 Bxd4 28 c3 Be5 29 Nf6+ Kg7 and Black is still slightly worse) 26 c3 Qd5 27 a3 Be5 28 Qf2 Qd3 and Black has decent compensation for the pawn, thanks to his active pieces, M.Hoffmann-S.Berndt, Germany 2000.

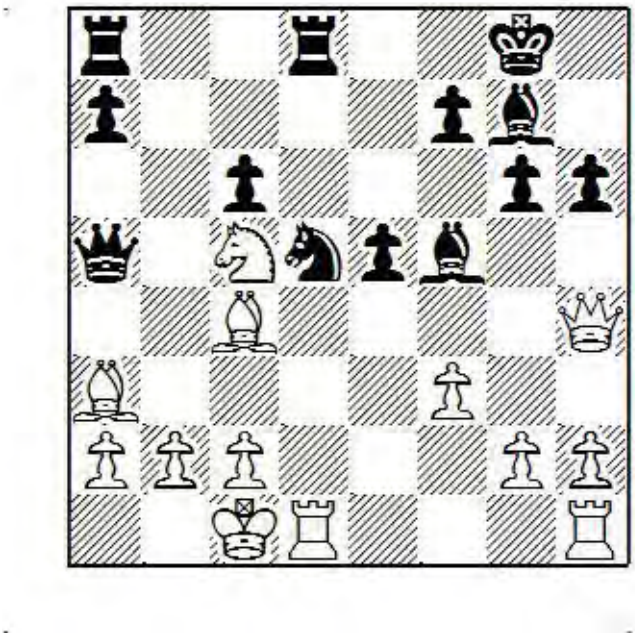
b) 17 ... Nf4 18 Bxe6 Nxe6 19 Be3 (White does not accomplish anything significant with 19 Qe7 either as 19 ... Qa5 20 Rxd8+ Rxd8 21 Qxa7 Qxa7 22 Bxa7 Ra8 23 Be3 Rxa2 with equal chances) 19 ... Nf4 20 g5 Ng2 21 Qf2 Nxe3 22 Qxe3 hxg5 23 Qxg5 Rd5, and a draw was agreed in E.Matsuura-K.Mekhitarian, Rio de Janeiro 2007, although White could consider something like 24 h4 Qd8 25 Rdg1 with a small plus for White because of the strong e4-knight and the less impressive g7-bishop.

c) 17 ... a5 18 g5 h5 19 Qf2 Rab8 (19 ... a4!? to take more space and prevent White from establishing a2-a4 plus b2-b3 is worth considering) 20 a4 Qb7 21 b3 Nf4 22 Bxe6 Nxe6 23 Ba7 (23 Bd6 Rbc8 is about even) 23 ... Ra8 24 Be3 Nd4 and Black has taken over command of the game, S.Burns-Mannion-D.Vocaturo, Hastings 2012.

17 Ba3 h6 18 Nc5 Bf5!?

My computer gives preference to 18 ... Bc8 19 Bb3 Rb8 20 Rhe1 Qc7, claiming just a tiny edge for

White. However, that is not Mamedov wanted to play against Caruana. The text move sets a clever trap.



Exercise: What happens if White now forks the black queen and rook with 19 Nb7?

19 Bb3!

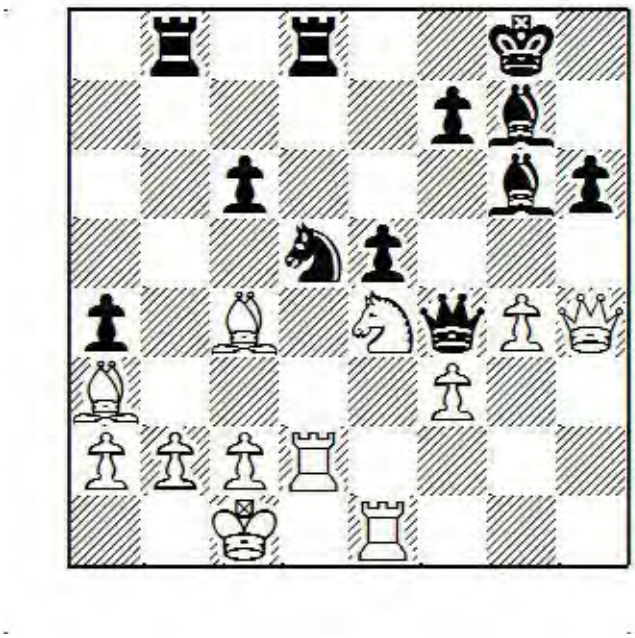
Answer: 19 Nb7?? is a tempting move but a massive blunder. Black wins rapidly after 19 ... Qa4! (with a hit on c2 and pinning the Bc4) 20 Rd3 Bf6, and White loses material after 21 Nc5 (the queen cannot move because the c4-bishop will drop) 21 ... Qxa3 22 Rxa3 Bxh4.

19 ... g5 20 Qf2 Qb6 21 g4 Bg6 22 Rd2 Nc7?!

Black loses the plot. Instead:

a) 22 ... Nf4 is the normal move and should be fine for Black.

b) Also 22 ... a5 looks interesting. One line runs 23 h4 gxh4 24 Qxh4 a4 25 Bc4 Rab8 26 Ne4 Qe3 27 Re1 Qf4.



This is a fascinating position where anything goes. I honestly cannot give an estimation on who is better here.

23 Ne4 Qxf2 24 Rxf2

White has a slight advantage. His bishops are slightly better than Black's. White's pawns structure is

somewhat better than Black's. However, Black's knight is nice and flexible as it is able to jump to either the d4- or f4-square.

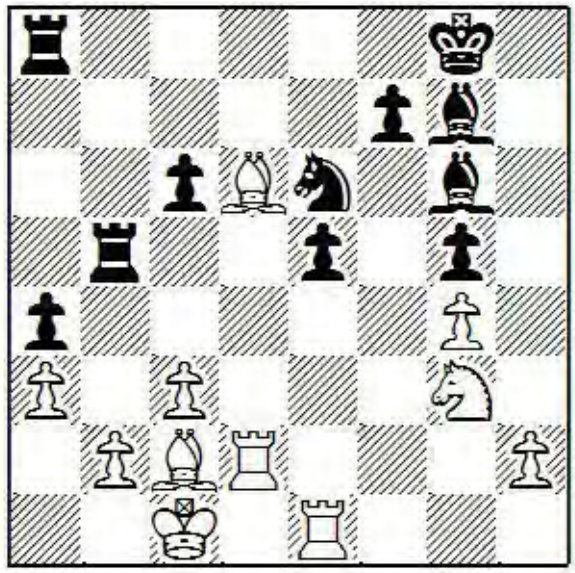
24 ... Nb5?! 25 Be7 Rdb8 26 c3

Also, 26 h4 Rb7 27 Bf6 gxh4 28 Bxh4 improves White's position while Black has only gotten more weaknesses.

26 ... Rb7 27 Bc5 a5 28 Bc2 a4 29 a3 Nc7 30 Bd6

Once again, 30 h4 is an interesting option. However, I think Caruana decided to keep that move in the bank for later, instead focusing on penetrating Black's defence elsewhere.

30 ... Ne6 31 Rd2 h5 32 Re1 hxg4 33 fxg4 Rb5 34 Ng3!



A beautifully simple move, calling attention to Black's weak light squares.

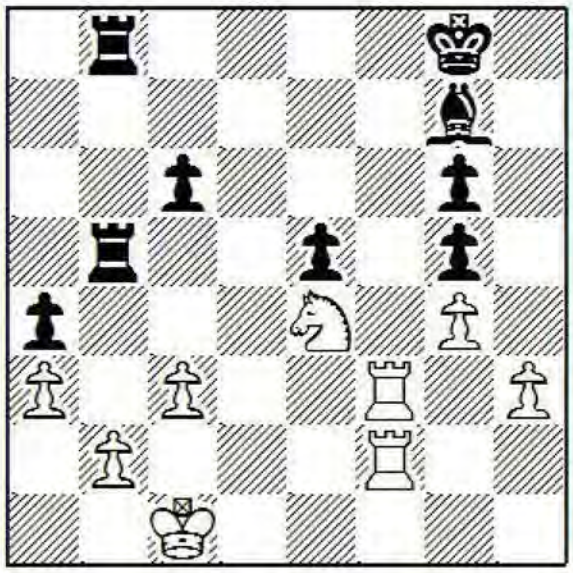
34 ... Nc5?

This only makes things worse. Black ends up with a dark-squared bishop, weak light squares and facing a white knight that can jump wherever he pleases. The only good news for Black is that White's pawns on the queenside are nicely restrained by Black's pawns, so it will take considerable effort for White to take advantage. Unfortunately for Mamedov, Caruana is a patient guy and does not mind toiling his way in as long as he wins.

35 Bxc5 Rxc5 36 Bxg6 fxg6 37 Ne4?!

A stronger option is 37 Rd6. There is no reason to allow Black to get his rooks coordinated. Now White really will have to work.

37 ... Rd5! 38 Rf1 Rad8 39 Kc2 Rb8 40 h3 Rdb5 41 Kc1 Rd5 42 Rf3 Rbd8 43 Kc2 Rb8 44 Rfd3 Rbd8 45 Rd1 Kf7 46 Rf1+ Kg8 47 Rdf3 Rb5 48 R1f2 Rdb8 49 Kc1



Finally White has gotten his pieces perfectly coordinated, while Black is left with no play. White threatens to play Rf7.

49 ... R5b7

Of course not 49 ... R8b7?? which is met with 50 Nd6 .

50 Rd3?!

The wrong rook! The point is that Black no longer can defend with ... Rd5. After 50 Rd2 Bf8 51 Rf6, White is winning.

50 ... Bf8 51 Nf6+!?

Of course, now 51 Rf6?? is met with 51 ... Rxb2 and White has to start thinking about saving the draw. That is why 50 Rd2 (to keep guarding the b-pawn) should have been played.

51 ... Kg7 52 Rd7+ Be7 53 Rxb7 Rxb7 54 Ne4

Even though Black's bishop is bad and his pawns are a mess. This is not an easy position to win, even with the superbly placed Ne4. The point is, the bad bishop guards good pawns and squares.

54 ... Rd7

Black could have played 54 ... Rb8!? 55 Kc2 Rh8 56 Rf3 Rc8, keeping the rook on the back rank to protect pawns, occasionally threaten White's h-pawn or to give a check. This would have offered Black better chances of a successful defence.

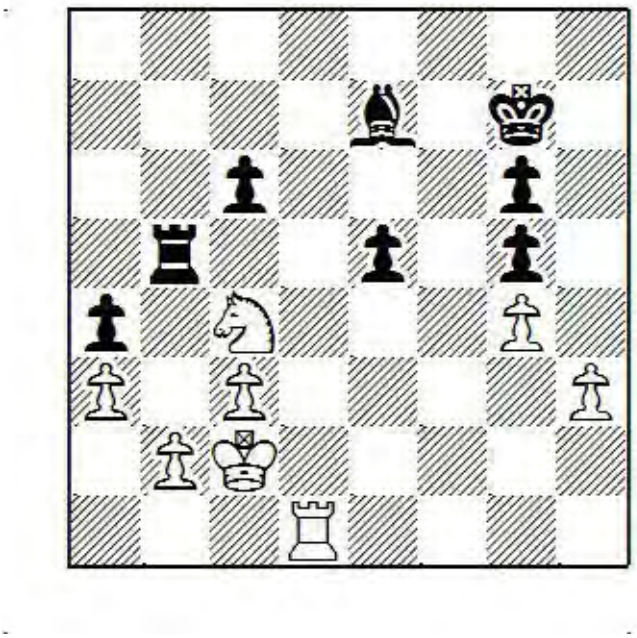
55 Kc2 Rb7 56 Nd2 Rb5 57 Nc4 Rc5 58 Kd3

Now White is making progress. The c5-rook certainly does not look impressive either.

58 ... Bd8 59 Rf1 Bc7 60 Nd2 Rb5 61 Kc2 Bd8 62 Rf3

White had a better continuation in 62 Re1 and after 62 ... Bc7 63 Re4 Ra5 64 Rc4 Ra6 65 Ne4, things are falling apart for Black.

62 ... Be7 63 Rf1 Bd8 64 Rd1 Be7 65 Nc4



65 ... Rc5

Instead, 65 ... Kf6! was the right way to defend for Black, but maybe he was getting tired. After the text move, White wins much faster.

66 Nb6 Ra5 67 Rd7 Kf6 68 Rc7 Ra6 69 Rxc6+ Kg7 70 Rc7 Rxb6 71 Rxe7+ Kf6 72 Re8

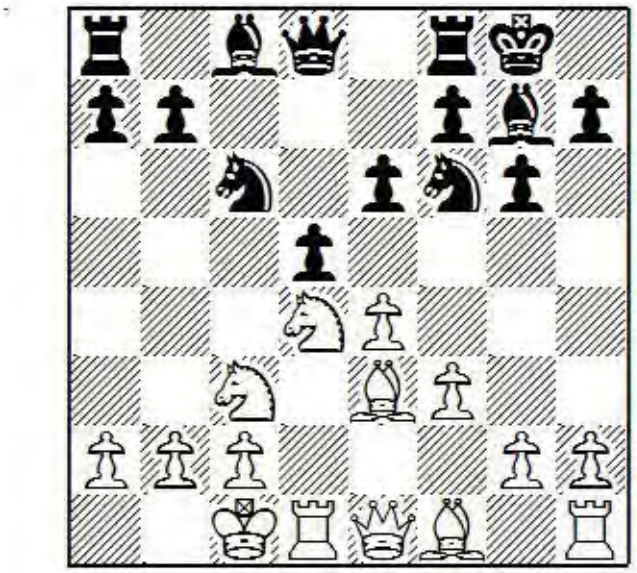
More precise was 72 Ra7 e4 73 Rxa4 Ke5 74 b4 Kf4 75 c4 Rd6 76 c5 Rd4 77 Ra6 e3 78 Re6 Kf3 79 c6 e2 80 b5 Rd5 81 a4 Kf2 82 c7 Rc5+ 83 Kd3 Rxc7 84 Rxe2+ but possibly Caruana was getting tired too and wanted to play it a bit safer.

72 ... Rb7 73 Ra8 e4 74 Re8 Re7 75 Rxe7 Kxe7 76 b4! 1-0

It is finally over.

Game 36
C.Kinkelin-J.Tay
Correspondence 1999

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 Qe1 e6



For those who are not ready for the long theoretical lines and forced play, then this move, intending to hold the tension in the centre is not a bad idea.

11 h4 Qc7!?

Question: What is the point of putting the queen on this square? What does it accomplish?

Answer: Apart from putting getting the queen out of the way of the Rd1, Black might be able to make use of the h2-b8 diagonal as seen later in the game. In some lines, the queen heads for the e5-, f4- or g3-squares and the king's knight might gain access to the g3-square.

12 h5

White does not accomplish anything of significance by exchanging on d5, for example 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 exd5 14 Qd2 Re8 15 h5 Rxe3 16 Qxe3 Nxd4 17 Rxd4 Bf5 18 Bd3 (18 Rd2?! d4 19 Qb3 Bh6 20 hxg6 Bxd2+ 21 Kxd2 Bxg6 and Black has the upper hand with the safer king plus better attacking chances) 18 ... Qb6 19 Rhh4 Be4 20 Rdxe4 Qxb2+ 21 Kd1 dxe4 22 Rxe4 Qxa2 23 hxg6 hxg6, despite Black being clearly better here, White managed to save the draw in A.Shirov-V.Topalov, Dos Hermanas 1996.

12 ... Nxh5!

Black has had success with 12 ... Nxd4 but objectively, after 13 Bxd4 Nxh5 14 Bxg7 Qf4+ (14 ... Kxg7 reduces Black to passivity after 15 e5 Qe7 16 Qe3 Kg8 17 f4 Bd7 18 g4 and Black will be unlikely to survive) 15 Kb1 Kxg7 16 exd5 Ng3 17 Ne2 Nxe2 18 Bxe2 exd5 19 Qc3+ f6 20 Rxd5, White has the initiative, J.Xiong-M.Bodek, Saint Louis USA 2014.

13 g4

We again need to examine the exchange on d5. After 13 exd5 exd5 (or 13 ... Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Bxd4 15 Rxd4 Ng3 16 Nb5 Qb8 17 d6 Nxh1 18 Nc7 Bd7 19 Nxa8 Qxa8 20 Bd3 Qd8 21 Qxh1 Qb6 which my computer evaluates as equal, but there is obviously plenty left to play for) 14 Ndb5 (14 Nxd5?! Qe5 is more comfortable for Black) 14 ... Qg3, and now White has to consider several moves, the most important of which are:

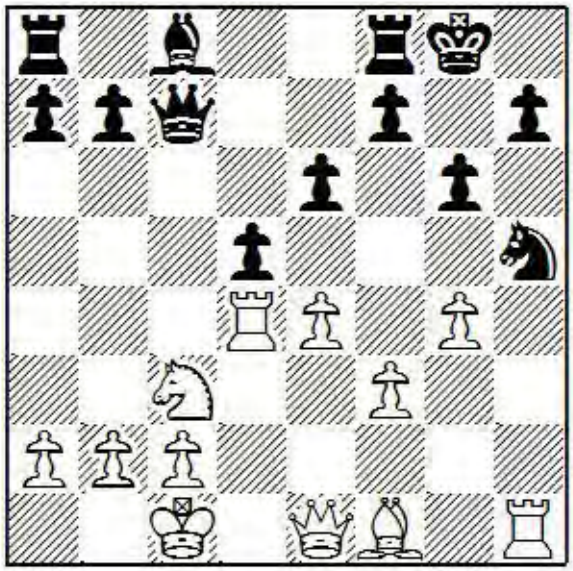
a) 15 Nxd5 Qxe1 16 Rxe1 Ng3 17 Rh4 Nf5 18 Rh2 Nxe3 19 Rxe3 Bd7 is perfectly comfortable for Black, H.Nakamura-R.Polzin, Mainz 2008.

b) 15 Bf2 Qf4+ 16 Be3 Qf6?! (or 16 ... Qg3! 17 Bf2 Qf4+ 18 Kb1 Be6 19 Rh4 Qe5 with a fascinating position favouring Black) 17 Rxd5 Nf4 (17 ... Be6? loses to 18 Bg5) 18 Rd6 Be6 19 Qd2 Nh5, M.Adams-V.Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1996, and here White could have claimed a clear advantage with 20 Nc7 Ng3 21 Nxe6 fxe6 22 Bc4 Rfe8 23 Re1 Ne5 24 Bb3 and White is winning.

13 ... Nxd4

The immediate 13 ... Ng3!? is also worth considering and 14 Ndb5 Qb8 15 Rh3 Nxf1 16 Qxf1 a6 17 Nd4 f5 18 Qh1 was tested in R.Alvarez-C.Alvarez Rouchaud, Argentina 1998. Now, Black should have continued with 18 ... Rf7 19 exf5 exf5 20 Rxh7 Bxd4 21 Rxf7 Bxe3+ 22 Kb1 Kxf7 where despite the fact that Black's king is alone and exposed, the best that White can expect is a draw by perpetual check.

14 Bxd4 Bxd4 15 Rxd4



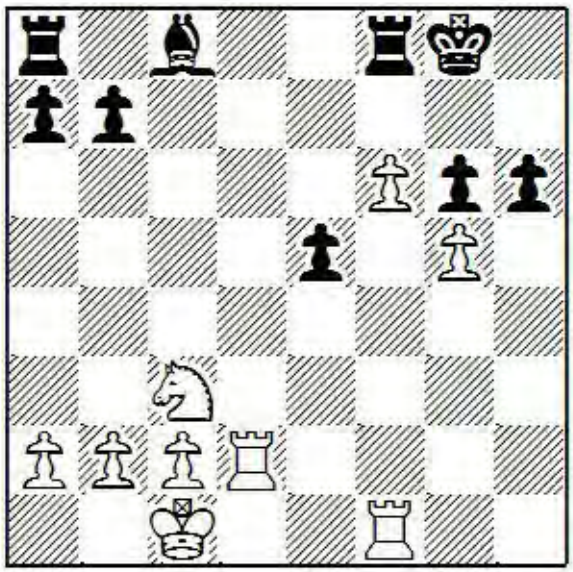
15 ... Ng3

A fascinating move. Both sides are quite weak on the dark squares, and possess bad light-squared bishops. Black has two additional alternatives:

a) 15 ... Qf4+ 16 Kb1 Nf6 (16 ... Qxf3 17 Qh4 Qf6 18 gxh5 Qxd4 19 hxg6 was played in P.Zelbel-R.Polzin, Austria 2012, and now according to Vigorito, 19 ... h6 20 Qxh6 Qg7 21 gxf7+ Rxf7 22 Qd2 is quite tricky for Black) 17 Be2 (17 Bd3!? looks like a possible improvement) 17 ... Kg7 18 Qg1 e5 19 Nxd5 Nxd5 20 Rxd5 Be6 gives equal chances, D.Overton-W.Taylor, correspondence 1996.

b) 15 ... Qe5 16 Qd2 Ng3 17 Rg1 dxe4 18 f4 e3 (18 ... Nxf1 19 Rxf1 was played in R.Mainka-B.Alterman, London 1994, and now Black's best would be 19 ... Qa5 20 g5 b6 21 Ra4 Qf5 22 Nxe4 Bb7 23 Nf6+ Kh8 24 Re1 h5 after which White certainly has enough for the pawn, but Black at least has active play) 19 fxe5 exd2+ 20 Rxd2 Nxf1 21 Rxf1 and now Black has tried the following:

b1) 21 ... f5?! 22 exf6 e5 23 g5 h6 was played in L.Nisipeanu-A.Timofeev, Kallithea 2008.



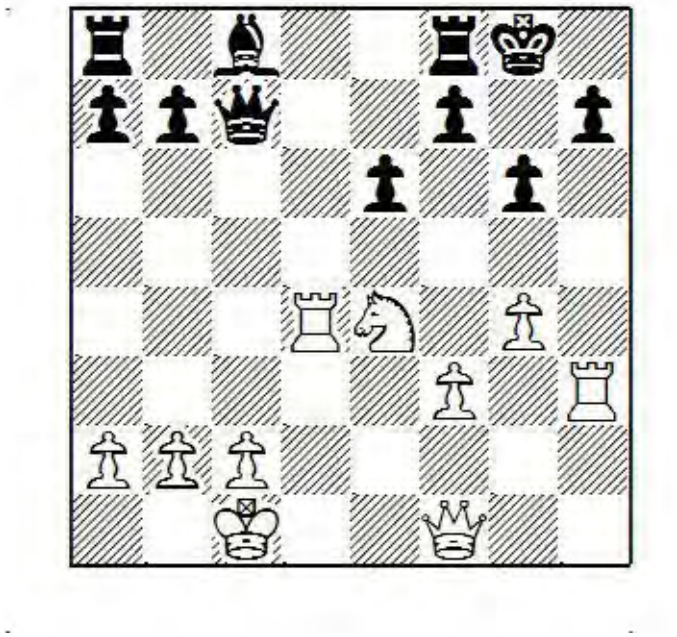
This undermining move is the idea behind 21 ... f5.

However, as pointed out by Rogozenco, White has a path to a clear advantage with 24 Rh1! hxg5 (24 ... h5 is the alternative, but after 25 Ne4 Be6 26 Nd6 b6 27 Re1, White is winning too) 25 Rdh2 Kf7 26

Rh7+ Ke6 and now a sequence of more or less forced moves arose with 27 Re7+ Kf5 28 Kd2! Rd8+ 29 Ke3 Kxf6 30 Rhh7 Be6 31 Ne4+ Kf5 32 Rh1 Bc4 33 Rg1 g4 34 Rg2 and it's game over!

b2) 21 ... b6 22 Ne4 h6 23 Nd6 a5 24 Rh2 Kg7 25 g5 h5 26 Rhf2 Ra7 27 Rf4 Re7 28 Kd2 and White dominates the dark squares with excellent winning chances via advancing the queenside pawns, T.Nedev-P.Drenchev, Illkirch-Graffenstaden 2004.

16 Rh3 Nxf1 17 Qxf1 dxe4 18 Nxe4



Question: I can see that Black is a pawn up, but this looks dangerous for Black. In particular, the dark squares seems weak. Would that be a correct evaluation?

Answer: 100% correct. This position is quite tricky for Black, but with accurate play he should be fine.

18 ... f5?!

Here 18 ... e5 is the most precise continuation and after 19 Rd6 f5 20 Nf6+ Rxf6 21 Rxf6 fxg4 22 fxg4 Bxg4 23 Rh4 Bf5, White has to resort to something like 24 Rxf5 gxf5 25 Qxf5 Qe7 26 Rg4+ Kh8 to keep things balanced.

19 gxf5?

White may have missed Black's reply. Instead 19 Ng5! Qg7 20 Qd3 h6 21 Rd8! is uncomfortable for Black.

The knight cannot be taken because of 21 ... hxg5 22 Rxf8+! Qxf8 23 Qd4 Qg7 24 Qd8+ Kf7 25 Rh8 and Black loses.

19 ... e5!

This intermezzo turns the game in Black's favour again.

20 Rc4 Qe7?!

Black can keep the initiative with 20 ... Qb6! 21 Kb1 Bxf5 22 Rh1 Rac8 23 Qd3 Qe6 and Black has an extra pawn to work with.

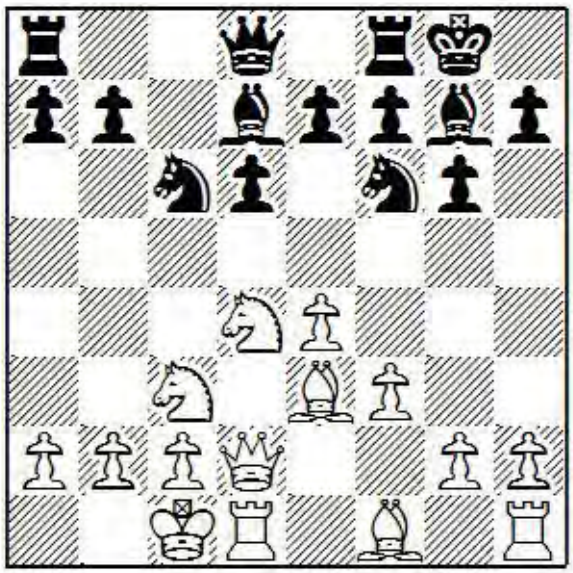
21 f6

The computer gives preference to 21 Rxc8 Raxc8 22 fxg6 hxg6 23 Qh1 Qg7, forcing a draw by repetition after 24 Ng5 Qf6 25 Ne4 Qg7. Now, however, everything is exchanged down to a drawn ending.

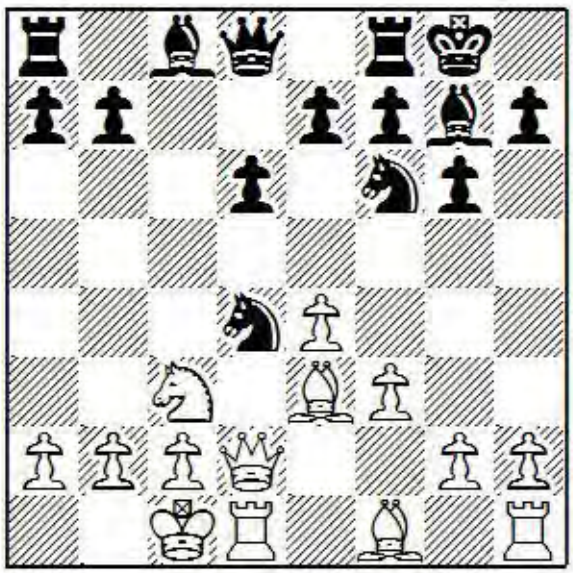
21 ... Bxh3 22 Qxh3 Rxf6 23 Nxf6+ Qxf6 24 Rc8+ Rxc8 25 Qxc8+ Kg7 ½-½

Chapter Seven
Yugoslav Attack without Bc4: 9 0-0-0 – 9…Bd7 and 9…Nxd4

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 Bd7



Or 9 ... Nxd4



The alternatives we will be examining in this chapter will hardly qualify as serious alternatives to 9 ... d5, which we covered in the previous two chapters. Nevertheless, they constitute Black's only alternatives to the theory-heavy main lines that Black allows after 9 ... d5. At best, Black will entertain somewhat complicated, but noticeably inferior positions in both lines. As an early conclusion before we

move on to look at the actual lines, it is safe to say that if Black wants to play the Dragon, he should be prepared to study, know and play some theory-heavy lines.

In Game 37, Black plays 9 ... Bd7, attempting to ignore the fact that White has not invested time with playing the standard Bc4 and Bb3. The other choice to avoid 9 ... d5 is to play 9 ... Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6. In Game 38, White continues with 11 Kb1! Qc7 12 g4 Rfc8 13 h4 Qa5, whereas the more critical 12 h4 Rfc8 13 h5 is the subject of Game 39.

Game 37
I.Zugic-H.Nakamura
Miami 2007

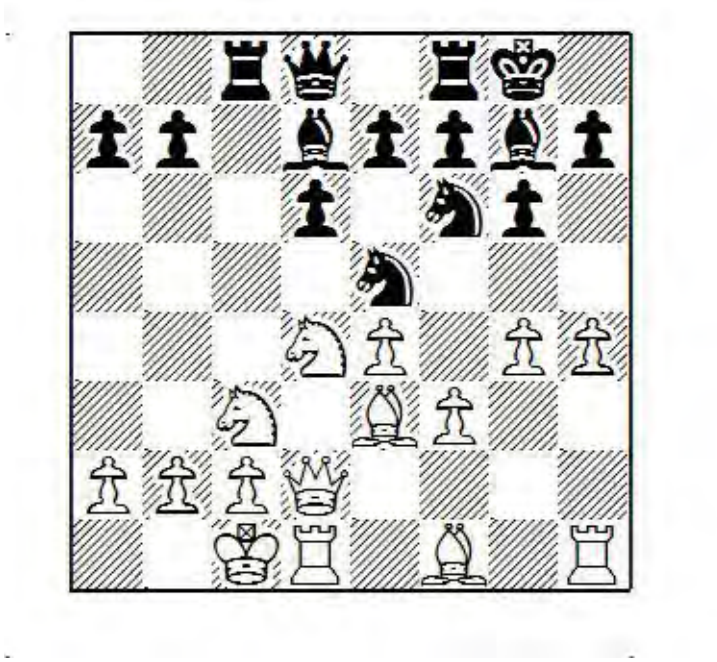
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 g4

In this chapter, we are concerned with 9 0-0-0 and then 9 ... Bd7. The immediate pawn punt 9 g4 will be covered in the next chapter.

9 ... Bd7 10 0-0-0

As indicated, this position can be attained via 9 0-0-0 Bd7 10 g4.

10 … Rc8 11 h4 Ne5



Question: It seems as if Black is playing normal moves without White having spent two moves on Bc4 and Bb3. Is the Dragon really that good to allow this?

Answer: Few openings are that good, and the Dragon is usually not amongst them. In fact if this variation is to work for Black, he has to change strategy right about now, unless he wants to get killed very quickly. If Black's e5-knight gets to c4 (a standard Yugoslav attack option), White saves two moves (without having to move the king's bishop to the b3-square) by hacking off the knight.

The alternative 11 ... h5 invites trouble as after 12 gxh5 Nxh5 13 Rg1 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Bxd4 15 Qxd4 Be6?! 16 Rg5 Qb6 17 Qd2 Rfd8 18 Rb5 Qg1 19 Rg5, Black is in serious trouble, S.Fedorchuk-J.Stocek, Germany 2006.

12 h5

Hammering forward. Let's look at some other choices:

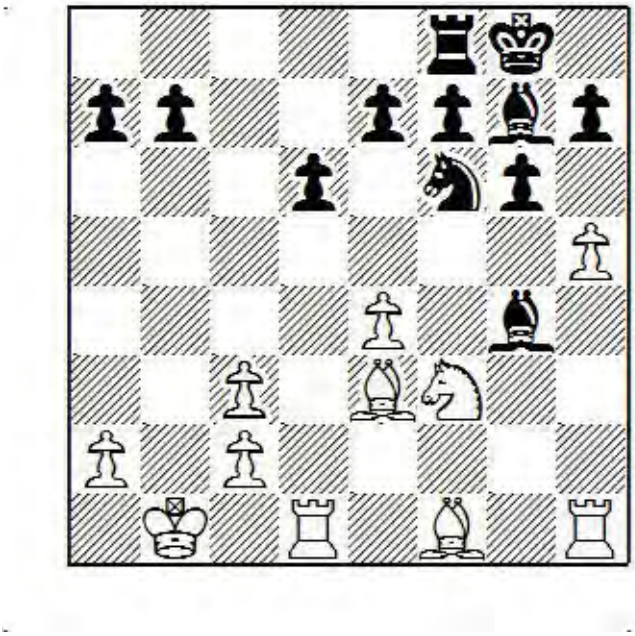
a) 12 Kb1 Qa5 (or 12 ... h5 13 gxh5 Nxh5 14 Rg1 Rxc3 15 bxc3 Qa5 16 Nb3 Qa4 17 Be2 which was played in N.Short-Le Quang Liem, Dresden 2008, and now 17 ... Rc8 18 Rg5 Nc4 19 Bxc4 Qxc4 would be interesting) 13 Be2 (13 Nd5 looks tempting but is harmless after 13 ... Qxd2 14 Nxe7+ Kh8 15 Bxd2 Rce8 with chances to both sides, P.Ponkratov-F.Amonatov, Izhevsk 2013) 13 ... Rxc3 14 Qxc3 Qxc3 15 bxc3 Rc8 16 Kb2 Be8 17 h5 Nfd7 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 Bh6 Bf6 20 g5 Bh8 21 Rh2 as played in E.Sutovsky-J.Hodgson, Oxford 1998, and now 21 ... Nb6! 22 Rdh1 Na4+ 23 Ka1 Nd7 gives Black a good game.

b) 12 Bh6?! distracts White more than it bothers Black and after 12 ... Bxh6 13 Qxh6 Rxc3! 14 bxc3

Qa5 15 Kb2 Rc8 16 Qd2? (16 Qe3 Qb6+ 17 Ka1 Nxf3 18 g5 Nxd4 19 cxd4 Rxc2 is a better option, giving equal chances) 16 ... Nxf3 17 Nxf3 Nxe4 18 Qd4 Nxc3 19 Bc4 Nxd1+ 20 Rxd1 Bxg4, Black is certainly doing well, I.Nikolaidis-D.Kanavarakis, Heraklio 1993.

12 ... Qa5

In the earlier days of this line, Black several times tried the hyper-aggressive 12 ... Nxf3 (as previously noted, 12 ... Nc4 just hands White two attacking tempi after 13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 hxg6) 13 Nxf3 Bxg4, but it has proven to be a bad idea when played this early.



One good continuation is 14 h6!? Bh8 (14 ... Bxf3 15 hxg7 Kxg7 16 Bh3 Ra8 17 Bh6+ and White has a large advantage) 15 Be2 b5 16 Rhg1 Be6 17 Ng5 Bc4 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 e5 Ng4 20 b3 Nxe5 21 bxc4 Nxc4 22 Qd3 and Black is trailing by ton in material, A.Giaccio-A.Hoffman, Salta Clarin 1995.

13 Kb1

This leads to interesting complications, but is hardly a threat to Black. The most critical choice is 13 Be2! which should worry Black considerably.

White nonchalantly completes development, trusting that his swifter kingside assault will pay dividends first.

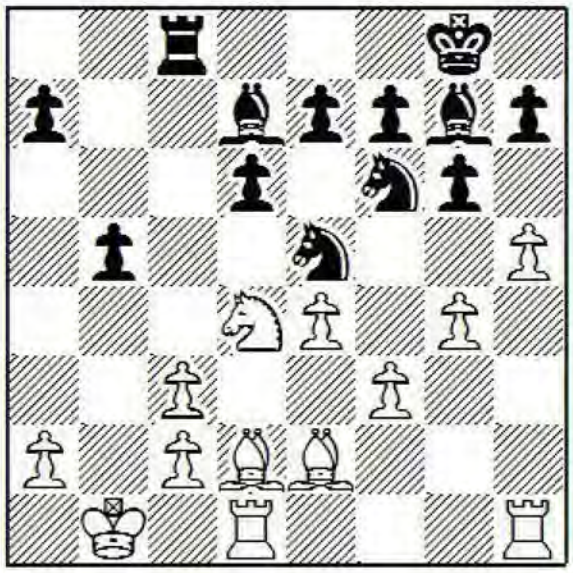
After 13 ... b5 (or 13 ... Nc4 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 hxg6 hxg6 16 Nb3 Qc7 17 Bh6 Rxc3 18 bxc3 Nxe4 19 fxe4 Bxc3 was played in G.Pogosyan-E.Sosulin, Tula 2015, now the most effective move is likely 20 Qh2 Bxg4 21 Rdg1 f5 22 Bxf8 Kxf8 23 Rxg4 fxg4 and White is obviously winning) 14 Kb1, now Black has a couple of tries which still prove insufficient:

a) 14 ... Rxc3 15 Qxc3 Qxc3 16 bxc3 Rc8 with following options for White:

a1) 17 hxg6?! fxg6 18 Kb2 a5 19 Bh6 Bh8 20 Rhf1 (Vigorito's suggestion of 20 Rb1 intending 20 ... Nc4+ 21 Kc1 is definitely an improvement for White with a substantial, if not winning advantage) 20 ... Nc4+ 21 Bxc4+ Rxc4 22 Rd3 Be8 and Black has decent compensation for the exchange, J.Smeets-M.Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2004.

a2) 17 Kb2 a6 18 Rh4 Nexg4!? (this seems a bit desperate, but Black clearly didn't like the prospect of defending the position an exchange down without active counterplay and instead defers to a position where he is a rook down for a few pawns) 19 fxg4 Nxe4 20 Bd2 (20 Rd3!? Nc5 21 g5 looks promising for White) 20 ... b4 21 Kc1 Nxc3 (or 21 ... Nxd2 22 Kxd2 Rxc3 23 g5 and White is clearly better) 22 Bxc3 Rxc3 23 g5 a5 24 Rf1 Rc5 25 hxg6 hxg6 26 Rg1 and Black definitely doesn't have enough for the rook, V.Kurgansky-F.Schilling, correspondence 2008.

a3) The simple 17 Bd2!? may in fact be White's best move.



After 17 ... a5 18 a3 Ne8 19 Kb2 Nc4+ 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Bg5 e6 22 Be3 d5 23 exd5 exd5 24 hxg6 hxg6 25 Ne2, White has a clear advantage, H.Daurelle-D.Brunsteins, correspondence 2007.

b) 14 ... b4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 exd5 and here:

b1) 16 ... Qxd5?? 17 Nf5! is obviously not acceptable for Black.

b2) 16 ... Rfe8 17 hxg6 hxg6 (or 17 ... fxg6 18 Qe1 and White is winning) 18 Bh6 Bf6 19 Qf4 Qc5 20 Bg5 Bg7 21 Qh2 and White's attack will crash through, H.Williamson-B.Thompson, correspondence 2008.

b3) 16 ... Bf6 17 hxg6 fxg6 18 g5 Bh8 19 Rh4! (doubling on the h-file as well as putting x-ray protection along the fourth rank) 19 ... Bg7 20 Rdh1 Qxd5 21 Rxh7 Nc4 22 Bxc4 Qxc4 23 Qh2 Rf5 24 b3! (this looks risky, but White has a clever and very specific plan in mind) 24 ... Qd5 25 Nxf5 Qxf5 26 Bc1! (this is the idea behind White's 24th move – to switch the bishop to b2 in order to exchange its dark-squared counterpart on g7, fatally weakening Black's kingside) 26 ... Qxf3 27 Bb2 Bxb2 28 Kxb2 Qc3+ 29 Kb1 and with the dark-squared bishop gone, there is not much of a defence left for Black's king to cling onto, Y.Butov-N.Zdanevich, correspondence 2011.

This line is probably the end of this road for Black unless he can find an improvement on the above.

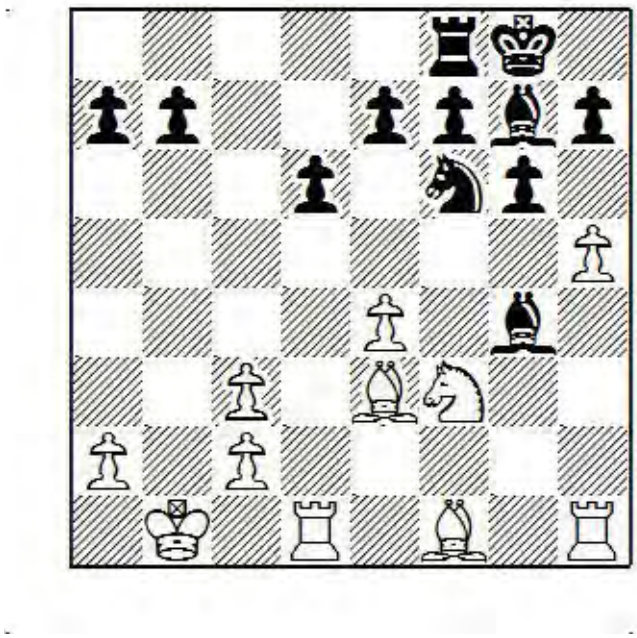
13 ... Nxf3!

With this, Black starts a sequence that tosses a whole rook for a truckload of pawns. Note that 13 ... Rxc3 Qxc3 14 Nxf3 transposes too.

14 Nxf3 Rxc3

Instead, 14 ... Bxg4 15 Bg2 Rxc3 16 Qxc3 Qxc3 17 bxc3 Nxe4 18 Rd3 (18 Bd4 e5 19 h6 Bh8, and White is a whole rook up, but Black's pawns are beginning to move forward, and that will possibly be sufficient to compensate for the rook, A.Zatonskih-S.Shivaji, Lindsborg 2004) 18 ... Nxc3+ 19 Kb2 (19 Kc1?! is inaccurate as 19 ... Bf5 20 h6 Bf6 21 a3 Bxd3 22 cxd3 Nd5 allows Black to keep the initiative, T.Hansen-R.Djurhuus, Norway 2002) 19 ... Nd1+ 20 Kb1 Nc3+ 21 Kb2 Nd1+ 22 Ka3 Nb2 23 Rd4 (23 Rb3 Nc4+ 24 Kb4 d5 25 Bxa7 Ra8 26 hxg6 hxg6 and Black has plenty of compensation thanks to the white king's precarious situation) 23 ... Bxd4 24 Bxd4 Nc4+ 25 Kb4 Bxf3 26 Bxf3 Ne5 27 hxg6 hxg6 28 c4 Rc8 29 Bxe5 dxe5 gives even chances in this endgame, although both sides need to watch their backs. If Black gets his pawns rolling on the kingside, White can face trouble, but if White can create a passed pawn on the queenside, then Black can be looking at defeat, K.Lahno-Bu Xiangzhi, Moscow 2004.

15 Qxc3 Qxc3 16 bxc3 Bxg4



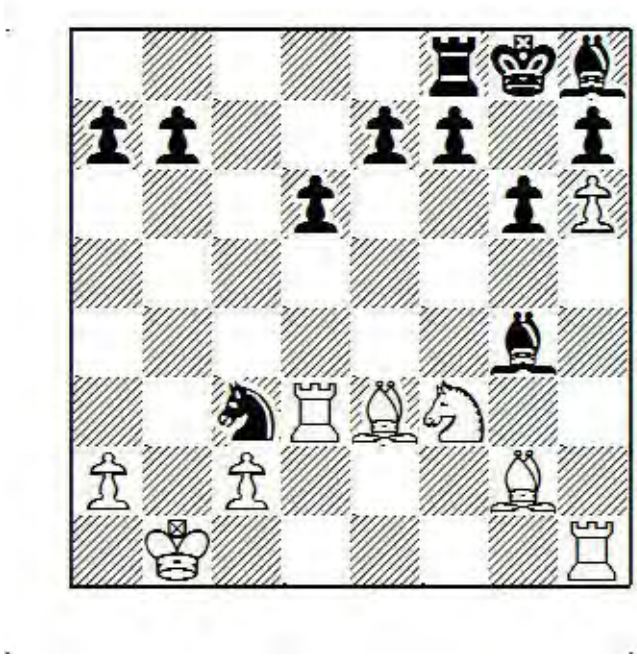
Question: Can Black just sacrifice a rook like this in return for a few pawns?

Answer: Well, in some cases, the Black pawns will be sufficient compensation. But as in so many other variations, it all depends on other factors, such as what material is left on the board, how many weaknesses each side has, how easily the weaknesses can be attacked, the position of the pieces, how easily the pawns can be advanced and so forth. There is not one answer that covers all positions. Each position has to be judged individually. In this case, the weak e- and c-pawns along with the exposed king do offer Black more or less adequate compensation. The fact is, these positions are not easy to play and therefore the player with the better understanding will often have excellent chances of succeeding.

17 h6

Vigorito analyses 17 Bg2 Nxe4 18 Rd3 Nxc3+ 19 Kb2! (19 Kc1 is met by 19 ... Bf5 with sufficient compensation) 19 ... Nd1+ 20 Ka3 Nb2 21 h6 (or 21 Rb3 Nc4+ 22 Kb4 d5 is unclear) 21 ... Bf6 22 Rb3 Nc4+ 23 Kb4 d5 24 Bxa7 Ra8 25 Bf2 Bd7 26 Nd4 Ra4+ 27 Kc3 e5 in all cases with complex play. It certainly should be tested in some practical games.

17 ... Bh8 18 Bg2 Nxe4 19 Rd3 Nxc3+



***Exercise* (analytical):** Try to calculate or analyse your way to the best continuation for White.

20 Rxc3?!

Answer: White pulls the emergency break, but does so a little too hard. A more challenging option is 20 Kb2 Ne2+ (or 20 ... Nd1+ 21 Kc1 Nxe3 22 Rxe3 Bf6 23 Ra3 a6 24 Bh3 and it is doubtful that Black has enough counterplay to fully compensate the rook, A.Chow-P.Dorsey, Dallas 1996) 21 Nd4 Ng3 was M.Dutreeuw-F.Pieri, Forli 1991, and now 22 Rg1! Be2 23 Rc3 Ba6 24 Bxb7 Ne2 25 Bxa6 Nxd4 26 Rg4 Ne6 27 Rb4 d5 28 Bf2 leaves White with the better chances.

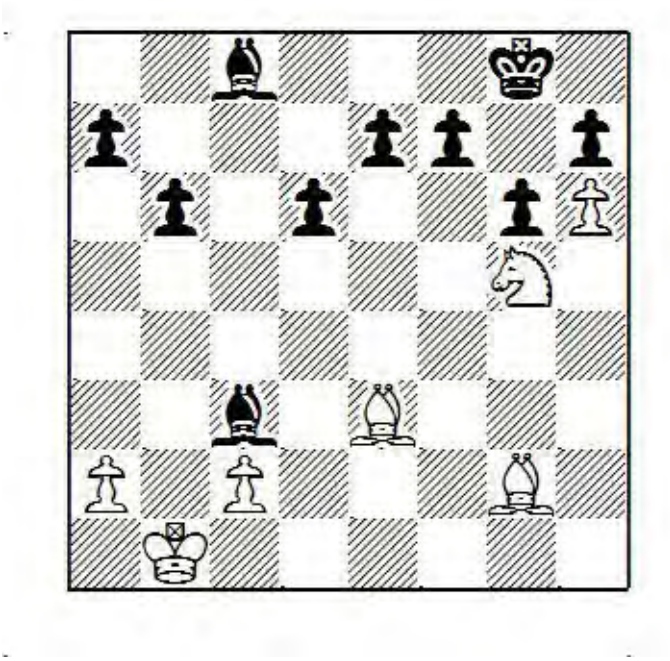
20 ... Bxc3 21 Rh4 Bd7 22 Rc4 Rc8!?

Black wants to head straight to the endgame, even at the cost of a pawn. Another idea is 22 ... Ba5 23 Ng5 b5 24 Rf4 Bc3 and Black has better chances.

23 Rxc8+ Bxc8 24 Ng5?

Instead, 24 Bxa7 offers better chances and at least it picks up one of the pawns that Black had collected.

24 ... b6



With four pawns for the piece and White's remaining pawns being almost as scattered and isolated as they can possibly be, Black is definitely better, possibly even winning. In the remainder of the game, he put the squeeze on and found the way to a win.

25 Kc1 e6 26 Bd2 Be5 27 Nf3 Bg3 28 Bg5 Bb7 29 Kd1 Bd5 30 a3 f5 31 Ne1 Bxg2 32 Nxg2 d5 33 a4 Kf7 34 Ke2 Bd6 35 Ne1 e5 36 Nf3 e4 37 Nd4 f4 38 c3 Be5 39 Kf2 Bxd4+ 40 cxd4 f3 41 Bd2 a6 42 Kg3 Ke6 43 Be1 b5 44 axb5 axb5 45 Bd2 Kf5 46 Be1 Kg5 47 Bd2+ Kh5 0-1

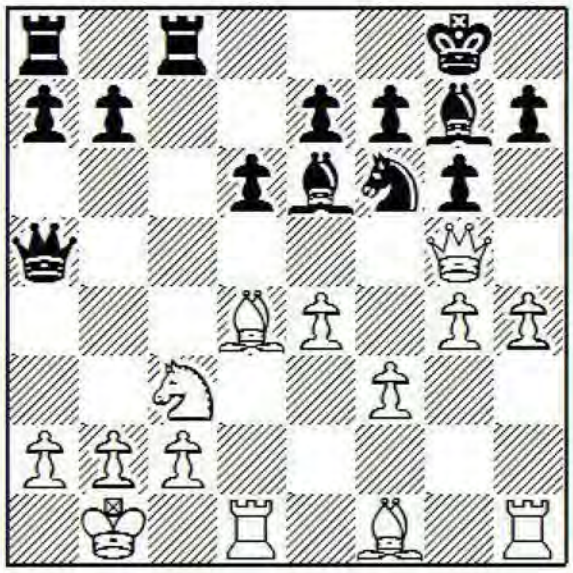
Game 38
O.Paetzold-G.Evans
Correspondence 2007

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6 11 Kb1 Qc7 12 g4 Rfc8 13 h4 Qa5

Question: It looks like Black has lost a tempo, first playing ... Qc7 and then ... Qa5. Why can't he play ... Qa5 in one go?

Answer: The key to answer lies in White's 11 Kb1, because if Black played 11 ... Qa5, then 12 Nd5! is good for White as 12 ... Qxd2 is not a check. White will then have 13 Nxe7+ available before recapturing the queen. If Black instead plays 11 ... Qd8, then 13 Nxf6+ exf6 14 Bc3 is clearly better for White as in S.Slipak-H.Spangenberg, Buenos Aires 1998.

14 Qg5!?



White is inviting Black to enter a queenless middlegame.

Two alternatives for White are:

a) 14 Nd5 Qxd2 15 Rxd2 (Or 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Rxd2 Bxd4 17 Rxd4 h6 18 a4 Kg7 19 Rb4 b6 20 Ba6 Rc5, and Black is quite comfortable, A.Onischuk-B.Macieja, Kazan 1997), and now taking with the knight is likely best: 15 ... Nxd5 16 exd5 Bd7 17 h5 Re8 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 g5 Bxd4 20 Rxd4 Kg7 21 Rdh4 Rh8 22 Rxh8 Rxh8 23 Rxh8 Kxh8 and we have equal endgame on our hands, A.Yermolinsky-G.Serper, Reno 2006.

b) 14 a3 is the kind of normal move that White will play if he has nothing better to do. That said, here it is pretty harmless and after 14 ... h5 15 Qg5 (15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nd5 Qxd2 17 Nxf6+ exf6 18 Rxd2 hxg4 19 fxg4 Bxg4 20 Rxd6 Bf3 and Black is really doing well, N.Georgiadis-C.Barros, Havana 2014) 15 ... b6!? 16 Qxa5 bxa5 17 g5 Nd7 18 Ba6 Rd8 19 Nd5 Bxd5 20 exd5 Rab8 21 a4 Nc5, Black has a decent game, J.Kraai-S.Kudrin, Reno 2004.

14 ... b5

An important question is of course, what happens if Black exchanges queens on g5? The conventional wisdom is that it leads to an uncomfortable queenless middlegame/endgame for Black. It is possible to defend, but it doesn't look like fun. Let's take a closer look:

After 14 ... Qxg5 15 hxg5 Nd7, we have the following options:

a) 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 and now:

a1)17 Rh4 Rh8 (17 ... Rc5 is also possible as suggested by M. Johnson in *Chessbase Magazine* and his analysis runs 18 f4 Rac8 19 Bd3 Bc4 20 Rdh1 Nf8 with an 'unclear' position, but I think only White can be better, if only by a smudge) 18 f4 Nb6 19 a4 a5 20 Bb5 Rad8 21 f5 Bc8 (21 ... Bc4 22 Bxc4 Nxc4 23 Nd5 is by no means lost for Black, but it looks quite depressing) 22 Rf1 f6 (Black can do better with 22 ... h6 23 f6+ exf6 24 gxf6+ Kg8 25 Rfh1 Be6 26 g5 h5 27 Rd1 and White is just a bit better) 23 gxf6+ Kxf6 24 Rh2 and White has a very comfortable advantage, P.Ricardi-A.Hoffman, Villa Gesell 1996.

a2) 17 Be2 and Black has the following options:

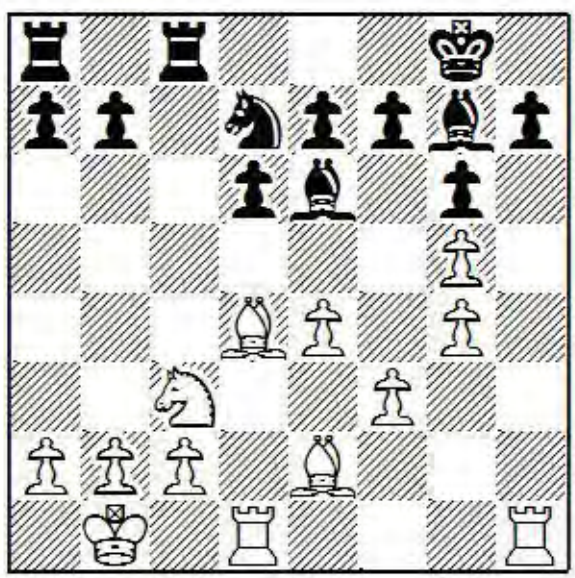
a21) 17 ... Ne5 18 Rh4 Bc4 19 Rdh1 (19 f4 Bxe2 20 Nxe2 looks like an improvement with White getting just a small, but pleasant endgame advantage) 19 ... Rh8 20 Bxc4 Nxc4 21 f4 Rac8 was played in M.Paragua-O.Barbosa, Phu Quoc 2007, and now 22 R4h3 Rc5 23 b3 Nb6 24 Kb2 would leave White with better chances in the endgame.

a22) 17 ... Nb6!? 18 f4 Rc5 19 Rh3 (19 f5!? looks like an improvement) 19 ... Rh8 20 b3 Bd7 21 Kb2 h5 22 gxh6+ Rxh6 23 Rxh6 Kxh6 with roughly equal chances, R.Reinaldo Castineira-D.Adla, Nigran

1997.

a23) 17 ... f6 18 gxf6+ Nxf6 was played in V.Ivanchuk-Ki.Georgiev, Tilburg 1993, and here Vigorito claims an edge for White after 19 g5, but 19 ... Nh5 20 Rh4 Rf8 looks perfectly acceptable for Black. In fact, I would rather be Black in this position.

b) 16 Be2!? is probably White's best option.



After 16 ... Bxd4 17 Rxd4 f6 18 gxf6 Nxf6 19 Nd5 Bxd5 20 exd5 Rc5 21 c4 Kg7 22 f4 with an uncomfortable endgame for Black, J.Kraai-M.Khachiyan, Saint Louis 2011.

15 Qxb5

Question: Didn't Black just lose a pawn for nothing?

Answer: It could certainly look that way, but if you look at it from a different perspective, then Black sacrificed a pawn to open a file directly facing White's king. In addition, White will have to spend time finding a decent retreat plan for the queen without giving too much away.

Instead, 15 h5? is a dreadful mistake that allows Black to pound his way through to White's king in traditional Dragoneer fashion with 15 ... Rxc3! 16 Bxc3 Qxa2+ 17 Kc1 Rc8?! (17 ... b4! 18 Bd4 b3! 19 hxg6 hxg6 20 c4 Rc8, and it is pretty much curtains for White) 18 hxg6 was E.Sobjerg-G.Vescovi, Copenhagen 1995, and now Black's best choice was 18 ... hxg6 19 Qe3 b4 20 Bd4 b3 21 c3 Qa1+ 22 Kd2 Qxb2+ 23 Ke1 a5 and things are looking very ugly for White.

15 ... Qc7 16 Qa4!?

Or 16 Qa6 Rab8 17 Bb5 Nxe4 18 fxe4 Bxd4 19 Rxd4 Rb6 with ... a6 to follow.

White may as well vacate the b-file with his queen to try to avoid tricks like 16 g5 Nxe4! 17 fxe4 Rab8 18 Qa4 Bxd4 19 Qxd4 (or 19 Nb5 Bd7!) 19 ... Qxc3 20 Qxc3 Rxc3 with a better endgame for Black.

16 ... Rab8 17 Ba6

Other tries:

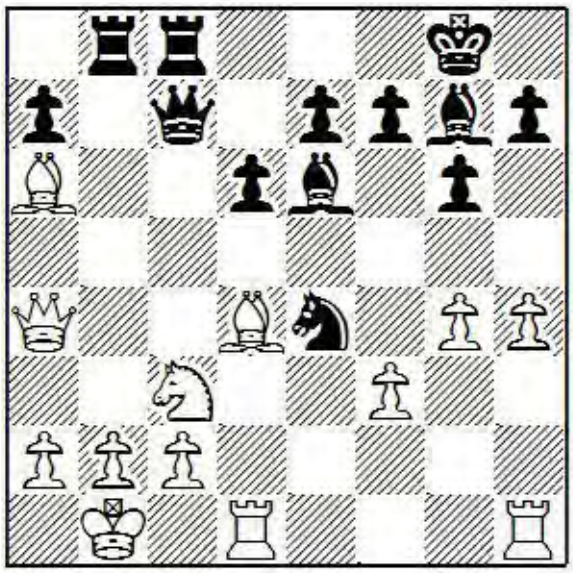
a) 17 Ka1 a5 (17 ... Qb7 18 Qa3 a5 is a suggestion of Vigorito's that appears to provide Black with full compensation for the pawn thanks to White's weird piece coordination) 18 Bb5 Qb7 19 Rb1 h5 20 g5 Ne8 21 Bxg7 Nxg7 22 Qd4 Rc5 and although Black has some compensation for the pawn, White should be better, Z.Almasi-Ki.Georgiev, Odorheiu Secuiesc 1995.

b) 17 Qxa7 is untested but obviously should be examined because White will now be up two pawns. It looks like Black will be fine after 17 ... Rb7 18 Qa4 (18 Qa3 Nd7!? 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Bb5 Ne5 and Black will win back at least one of the pawns while keeping the initiative) 18 ... Bd7! 19 Qa3 (19 Nb5

Nxg4 20 Nxc7 Bxa4 21 fxg4 Rbxc7 22 b3 Bc6) 19 ... e5 20 Ba6 exd4 21 Bxb7 Qxb7 22 Rxd4 Nxe4! 23 Nxe4 Bxd4 24 Nxd6 Bxb2! 25 Qxb2 Qxf3 and Black has ample compensation for pawn thanks to White's open king.

17 ... Bd7

As we will see, 17 ... Nxe4!? is a thematic sacrifice that we will need to take into consideration in positions such as this where Black has all his heavy pieces pointing directly at the white king.



For instance 18 Nb5 (both 18 Nxe4 Bd7! 19 Qc4 Qxc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 and 18 fxe4? Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Qxc3 20 Qxc3 Rxc3 21 g5 Ra3 22 Bd3 Rxa2 end up with a small but clear advantage for Black) 18 ... Bxd4 19 Rxd4 Rxb5 20 Bxb5 a6 21 Bf1 Bd7 22 Qb3 Be6 with a draw by repetition.

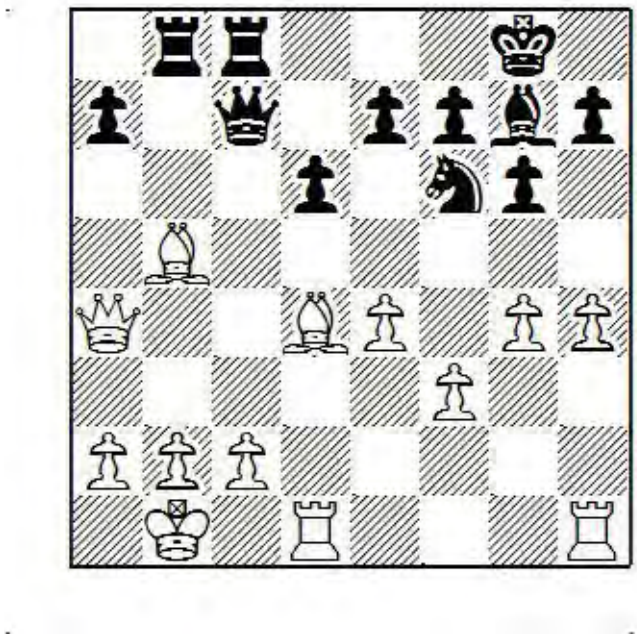
18 Nb5

Tying yourself up in this fashion sort of begs for trouble. On a couple of occasions, White has tried the queen retreat instead: 18 Qa3 Nxe4 19 fxe4 (19 Bxc8?? is swiftly punished with 19 ... Bxd4! 20 Nd5 Bxb2 21 Qxb2 Rxb2+ 22 Kxb2 Qb8+ 23 Ka1 Bxc8 and Black soon won, K.Kerek-D.Feletar, Hungary 2002) 19 ... Bxd4 20 Rxd4 Qxc3 21 Qxc3 Rxc3 22 e5 Rg3 23 exd6, A.Ivanov-A.Pixton, Philadelphia 2001, and now Black's best is 23 ... e5 24 Rd2 Rxg4 with a complicated endgame.

18 ... Bxb5

Black has also tried 18 ... Qc6 19 Bxc8, M.Ashley-A.Kaliksteyn, Philadelphia 2001, and now (19 g5 initiates a forced sequence into an endgame that is only marginally better for White 19 ... Nh5 20 Bxg7 Nxg7 21 c4 Qxc4 22 Qxc4 Rxc4 23 Nxd6 Ra4 24 Bb5 Bxb5 25 Nxb5 Rb4 26 Nxa7 Rxb2+ with a complicated endgame ahead) 19 ... Rxc8! 20 Bxa7 Qxb5 21 Qxb5 Bxb5 with a very complex endgame which I would hate to assess.

19 Bxb5



Exercise (tactical): What is Black's best move?

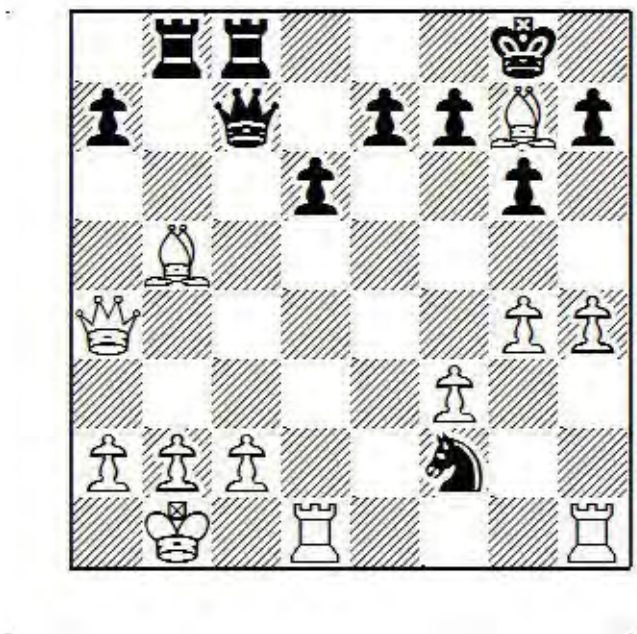
19 ... Nxe4!

Answer: Yes, it's the thematic knight sacrifice again. I admit that while the first move is easy to guess, then calculating the rest may be quite a bit trickier. Another good, but not as good, move is 19 ... Nxg4!? 20 c3 (20 fxg4 Bxd4 transposes to the line given in the note after White's 20th move) 20 ... Bxd4 21 cxd4 Ne3 22 Rc1 Qb6 23 Rxc8+ Rxc8 24 Qa6 Qxa6 25 Bxa6 Rc6 and Black has a small advantage in the endgame. The knight is rather strong and the white pawns are somewhat weak.

20 Bxg7

The alternative is 20 fxe4 Bxd4 21 Rxd4 Rxb5 22 a3 Rcb8 23 Rb4 Rxb4 24 axb4 Qb7, winning a pawn.

20 ... Nf2!



20 ... Nc5!? is a decent alternative. For instance, after 21 Qc4 Kxg7 22 h5 e5, Black has the better chances. Nevertheless the game continuation is stronger. Black has worked out that the knight will not get trapped behind enemy lines.

21 Bc3?

White should have opted for the relatively better 21 Rc1 Nxh1 22 Bd4 Ng3 which is still clearly better

for Black, but the bishop pair and the weak dark squares around Black's king do provide a measure of compensation for the exchange.

21 ... Nxd1 22 Rxd1! Qc5

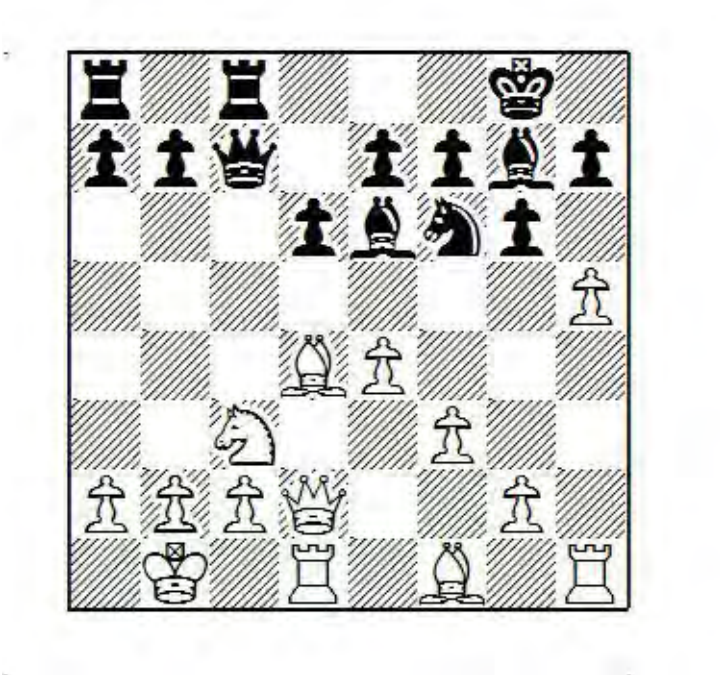
Winning a piece back. Of course this was part of the calculation that Black had made earlier.

23 Bd4 Qxb5 24 Qxb5 Rxb5 25 Bxa7 Re5 26 c3 Re2 27 Rd4 Ra8 0-1

Even though the resignation came at what seems rather early, this is after all a correspondence game.

Game 39
F.Kindbeiter-P.Cullen
Correspondence 2004

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6 11 Kb1 Qc7 12 h4 Rfc8 13 h5



This time, White goes for the jugular without skipping a beat with ... g2-g4.

Question: Can Black take on h5 and brave the attack?

13 ... Qa5

Answer: No, unless Black has a death wish. After 13 ... Nxh5?? 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 g4 Nf6 16 Qh6+ Kg8 17 e5 dxe5 18 g5, Black is toast following 18 ... Nh5 19. Rxh5 gxh5 20 Bd3 e4 21 Nxe4 and there is no good way to stop Nf6+ with a kill.

14 hxg6!

White's strongest option, opening the h-file for later use.

Two other choices are:

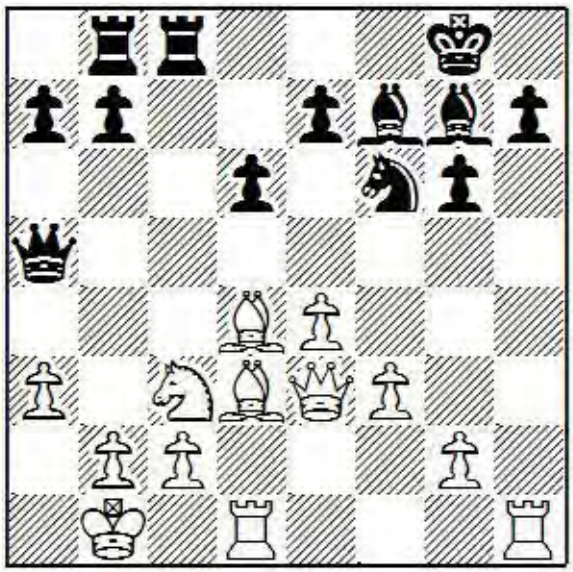
a) 14 h6 is an attempt to grab space for a positional squeeze, but Black should be okay after 14 ... Bh8 15 a3 Nd7 16 Nd5 Qxd2 17 Rxd2 Bxd5 18 exd5 Bxd4 19 Rxd4 f5 and Black has completely solved his opening problems, L.Psakhis-C.Ward, Copenhagen 2000.

b) 14 a3 was played in a high level correspondence game, but it does not present Black with any substantial problems following 14 ... Nxh5! 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 g4 Rxc3 17 Qd4+ f6 18 Qxc3 Qxc3 19 bxc3 Nf4 and Black has ample compensation for the exchange, G.Sanakoev-M.Lecroq, correspondence 1994.

14 ... hxg6

We also need to take a quick look at the not entirely uncommon 14 ... fxg6 15 a3 Rab8 (or 15 ... Bf7 16 g4 Rab8 17 g5 Nh5 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Bh3 Rc4 20 Bg4 b5 as seen in A.Hunt-A.Pixton, Hinckley Island 2009, and now 21 Bxh5 gxh5 22 Qd3 b4 23 Nd5 Rc3 24 Qd4+ e5 25 axb4 exd4 26 bxa5 Rxf3 27 Rxd4

leaves White with a favourable endgame, although winning it will not be all that easy) 16 Bd3 Bf7 and now White has a star move in 17 Qe3! (White has also tried 17 Ne2 but after 17 ... Qxd2 18 Rxd2 a6 19 Re1 Nd7 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Nc3 b5 22 Bf1 Rc5 23 Rd4 Ne5 24 Nd5 Bxd5 25 exd5 g5, Black was doing fine, S.Shankland-Le Quang Liem, Vung Tau 2008).



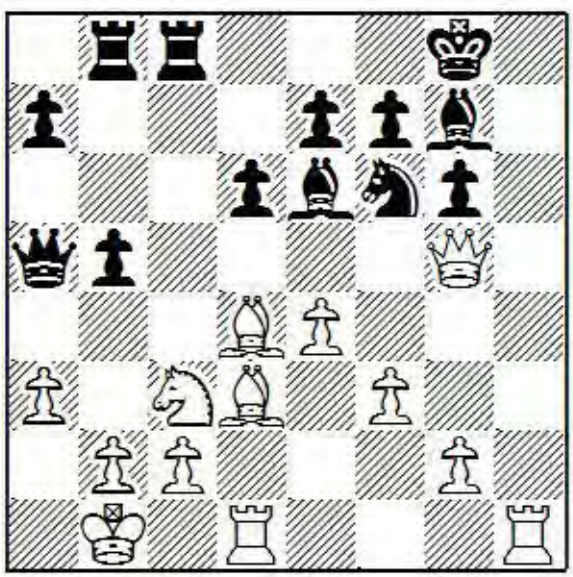
The idea is to prepare Nd5 without trading queens. After 17 ... b5 18 Nd5 e5 19 Ne7+ Kf8 20 Nxc8 exd4 21 Qxd4 Rxc8 22 Qxd6+ Kg8 23 e5 Rd8 24 Qb4 Qxb4 25 axb4, White has an obvious advantage, which was duly converted in C.Muck-B.Jaederholm, correspondence 2007.

15 a3 Rab8 16 Bd3

This is clearly White's most challenging move. White has tried 16 Ne2 but it does not challenge Black in the least, as 16 ... Qxd2 17 Rxd2 a6 18 Nf4 Bc4 19 Bxc4 Rxc4 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Nd5 Bg5 22 f4 e6 23 fxg5 exd5 24 exd5 Re8 leaves chances completely level, S.Fedorchuk-D.Dvirnyy, Pavia 2009.

16 ... Bc4

Black has frequently played 16 ... b5, but he has been punished relentlessly after 17 Qg5 which works well in this line. White plans a full scale assault with Qh4 and for the moment, the b5-pawn is pinned and cannot advance.



We will also come across this idea in the 9 g4 variation (see Game 40). Black has tried several defensive and aggressive measures, but

none of them look particularly convincing:

a) 17 ... d5 18 Nxd5 Bxd5 was played in A.Jakubiec-G.Agamaliev, Polanica Zdroj 1999, and here the simplest and best continuation would be 19 exd5 b4 20 Bxg6! fxg6 21 Qxg6 bxa3 22 Rh7 Rxb2+ 23 Bxb2 a2+ 24 Ka1 and there is nothing Black can do to delay mate for much longer.

b) 17 ... Rc5 is properly labelled by Vigorito as "desperate", not surprisingly as after 18 Bxc5 dxc5 (18 ... b4 runs into 19 Be3! and Black's attack is stalled) 19 Qxc5 Nd7 20 Qb4 Qc7 21 Nd5 Bxd5 22 exd5 Nc5, J.Bartholomew-J.Van de Mortel, Internet (rapid) 2009, and now 23 Rh4 a5 24 Qf4 Qxf4 25 Rxf4 f5 26 c3 has White steering towards the win.

c) 17 ... Bc4? is a loser right out of the gate as 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 Nd5 Qd8 20 Bxf6 exf6 (now the d5-knight is an unchallenged beast that will be the end for Black) 21 Qh4 b4 22 axb4 a5 23 Rh3 Rcxb4 24 Rdh1 Rxb2+ 25 Ka1 has Black needing to shed a lot of material to avoid mate, so he resigned in D.Stojanovic-I.Galic, Bihac 2010.

d) 17 ... Rxc3 has been suggested, but it is no better than the other lines. Following 18 Bxc3 Qa4 19 Rh4! (directed at Black's queenside 'attack') 19 ... b4 20 e5 (pinning the b-pawn, the idea behind the previous move) 20 ... Nd5 21 Bd2 dxe5 22 Bxg6 fxg6 23 Qxg6 and Black's defence is collapsing.

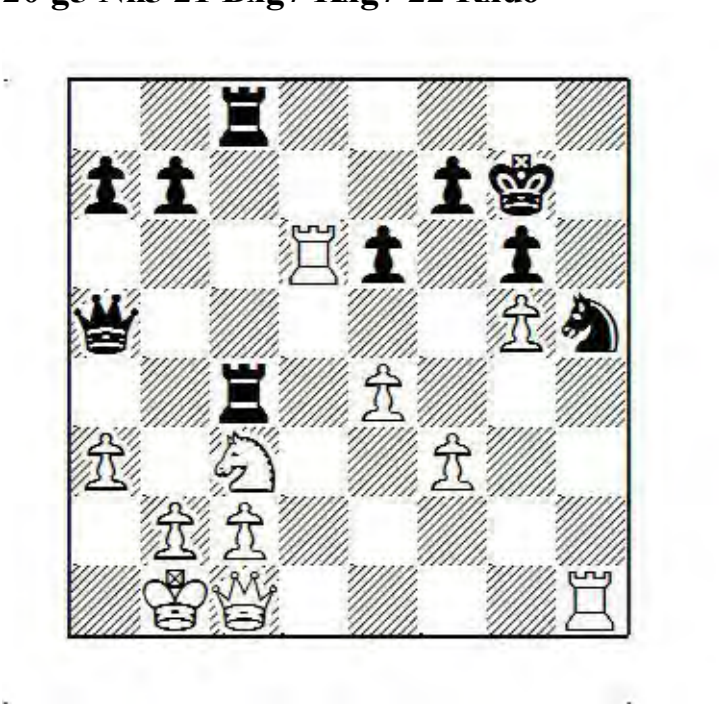
17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Qc1

White achieves nothing with 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Nd5 Qxd2 20 Rxd2 (or 20 Nxf6+ Kg7 21 Nh5+ gxh5 and a draw was agreed in A.Moen-K.Trygstad, Oslo 2009) 20 ... Kg7 21 g4 Bg5 22 Rdh2 Rg8 23 b3 Rc5 and while the knight is possible stronger than the bishop, chances however, are approximately equal, S.Marjanovic-H.Messing, Bela Crkva 1984.

18 ... e6 19 g4 Rbc8

Another try for Black has been 19 ... b5, but it is most likely just a pretty terrible idea. After 20 g5 Nh5 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Rxh5!, it is curtains for Black with 22 ... gxh5 23 Qf4 Kg8 24 g6! (now the barn is crashing down on top of Black's king) 24 ... f5 25 Rxd6 Rxc3 26 Qe5 Rc7 27 Qxe6+ Kg7 28 exf5 b4 29 f4 bxa3 30 Rd7+ with imminent mate forcing resignation, M.Bennedik-V.Demian, correspondence 2002.

20 g5 Nh5 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Rxd6



Question: Black is a pawn down, his king is certainly weaker than White's and the knight on h5 is completely out of play. Is it safe to assume that Black's opening has been a bust?

Answer: Not so fast! If Black did not have any resources up his sleeve, then you would be right. But incidentally, he does have something to work with on the next move.

22 ... Ng3!

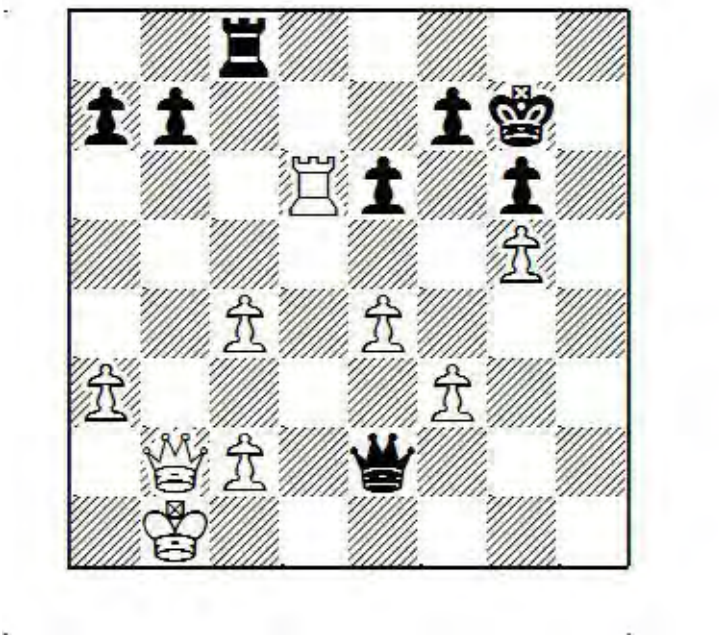
Black has tried:

a) 22 ... Qe5?! 23 Qd2 b5 24 Rd7 a5 25 f4 Qc5 26 f5 and Black is about to be run over, M.Parligras-M.Cebalo, Nova Gorica 2004.

b) A key alternative is 22 ... Rxc3 23 bxc3 Ng3 24 Rhd1 (24 Re1 transposes to our main game) 24 ...

Ne2 25 Qb2 Nxc3+ 26 Ka1 Qxg5 (or 26 ... Qc5 27 R6d3 b5 28 f4 which was played in O.Korneev-J.Koch, France 2007, and here Vigorito gives 28 ... e5 29 Rf1 exf4 30 Qb4 Qxb4 31 axb4 Nxe4 32 Rxf4 Nxg5 and Black has counterplay in the endgame) 27 Rxe6 Kg8 28 Re8+ Rxe8 29 Qxc3 and the players agreed to a draw, P.Dahl-S.Aguilar, correspondence 2002.

23 Re1 Rxc3 24 bxc3 Ne2! 25 Rxe2 Qb5+ 26 Qb2 Qxe2 27 c4+!



White needs to be active even if it is at the cost of a pawn.

27 ... Kg8 28 Qc3 Qg2 29 Rd7 Qxg5 30 Rxb7 Qc5 31 Qb3

Another try in a more recent game was 31 Kb2 a6 32 Qd3 Qxc4 33 Qxc4 Rxc4 34 Kb3 Rd4 35 a4 Rd1 36 Ra7 Rf1 and a draw is likely, D.Leben-V.Zelovic, correspondence 2008.

31 ... Qxc4 32 Qxc4 Rxc4 33 Kb2 a5 34 c3 f5

Or 34 ... Rc5 35 a4 Kg7 36 Rb5 Rh5 37 c4 Kf6 38 c5 Ke5 39 Rxa5 f5 40 Kc3 Rh3 41 exf5 gxf5 42 Kc4 Rxf3 with an interesting struggle.

35 Kb3 Rc5

Another defensive plan is 35 ... Rc8 36 c4 g5 37 Rb5 Rf8 38 Rxa5 Kg7 39 exf5 exf5 40 a4 Kf6 41 Rd5 Rb8+ 42 Ka3 g4 43 fxg4 fxg4, and Black should hold the draw.

36 c4 Kf8 37 Rb5 a4+ 38 Kb4 Rc7 39 Rb8+

Instead, after 39 exf5 gxf5 40 c5 Ke7 41 Kxa4 e5, Black has good saving chances. The passer which he will create on the e-file should allow him to get a proper setup to defend against the a- and c-pawns. Indeed, it is a very tricky defence.

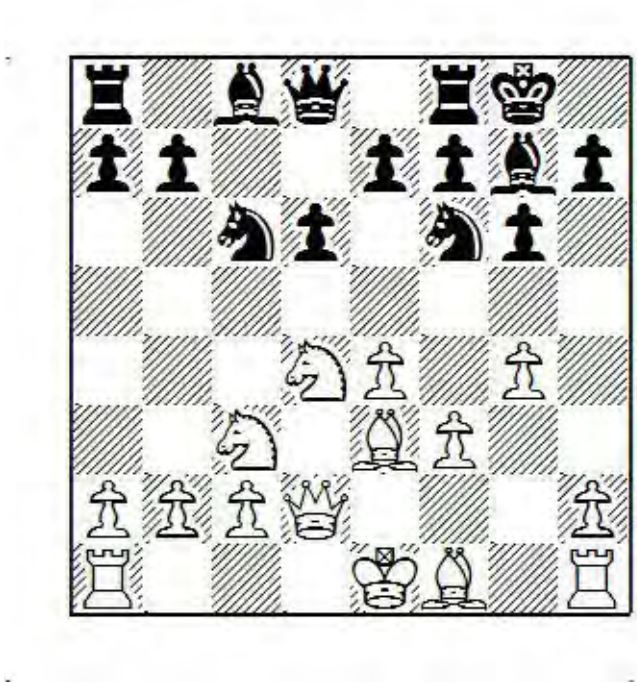
39 ... Ke7 40 c5 g5?

This is a mistake that Black cannot afford. Black is trying to create a passed pawn, but he can has one readily available with 40 ... fxe4 41 fxe4 Kd7 42 Kc4 Rc8 43 Rb7+ Rc7 44 Rb6 g5 45 Rd6+ Kc8 46 Rxe6 Rg7 47 Re8+ Kd7 48 Ra8 Kc6, and while Black certainly is not winning, he is still fighting to see another day.

41 exf5 exf5 42 Rg8 g4 43 fxg4 fxg4 44 Rxg4 Rc6 45 Kb5 Re6 46 Rd4 Re3 47 Kxa4 Rc3 48 Kb5 Rb3+ 49 Kc4 Rb8 50 c6 1-0

Chapter Eight
Yugoslav Attack without Bc4: 9 g4

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 g4



The g4 line of the Yugoslav Attack is an interesting diversion from the rest of the lines in the variation complex. While keeping in hand the option of sharpening the game, the line is mostly positional and therefore, it is not surprising to see players who would otherwise never venture into the Yugoslav Attack behind the White pieces in the 9 g4 variation. For instance, in the early 1980s, the world champion Anatoly Karpov played the line occasionally. While it is not theoretically particularly threatening for Black, the better player has a good chance of outplaying to opponent without having to learn a humongous amount of theory.

In Game 40, we see an example of why move orders have to be understood well. Black plays 9 ... Nxd4?! 10 Bxd4 Be6, but now rather than continuing along the main line with 11 0-0-0, White punishes Black for his careless choice of move order by playing 11 h4!, followed by 12 h5. The correct move order is 9 ... Be6 and then after 10 0-0-0, Black plays 10 ... Nxd4 11 Qxd4 Qa5. Now, White has the option of 12 Kb1 Rfc8 13 a3 as seen in Game 41 or 12 a3 Rfc8 13 h4 as played in Game 42. The reason why Black occasionally 'forgets' to play 9 ... Be6 first is discussed in Game 43, where White tests the slightly annoying 10 Nxe6 fxe6 11 0-0-0.

Game 40
K.Szabo-R.Skytte
Budapest 2014

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 g4 Nxd4?!

Question: Now why do you call this move dubious? It seems like both this and 9 ... Be6 followed by ... Nxd4 lead to the same position.

Answer: This move order is considered highly inaccurate because it allows White to dispense with queenside castling and get his attack going before committing his king.

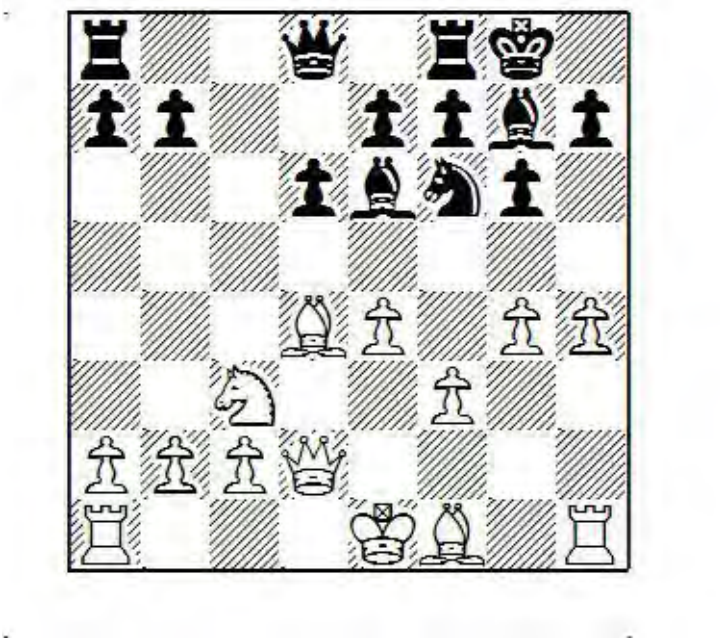
The accurate move order is 9 ... Be6 10 0-0-0 (10 h4 runs into the immediate counter-attacking 10 ... d5!) 10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Qa5, reaching the positions we will look at in our next two main games.

In the last game of this chapter, we will examine 10 Nxe6, which is the only deterrent for Black in

considering whether to embark on 9 ... Be6.

10 Bxd4 Be6 11 h4!

White starts his kingside offensive immediately, even before castling into safety.



Instead, 11 Nd5 was Karpov's choice in his classic win again Mestel in London 1982. Nowadays this move is not considered particularly problematic for Black, who now has to choose between the following moves:

a) 11 ... Bxd5 12 exd5 Qc7 13 h4 Rac8 14 Rh2 e5 15 dxe6 fxe6 16 0-0-0 and now:

a1) 16 ... e5?! 17 Be3 Qf7 18 Kb1 d5 19 h5 e4 was seen in A.Grischuk-H.Nakamura, Moscow 2012, and as pointed out by Milos, White could now have played 20 h6 Bh8 21 g5 Nh5 (or 21 ... Nd7 22 Rf2 exf3 23 Rxf3 Qxf3 24 Bg2 Qf5 25 Bxd5+ Rf7 26 Bxf7+ Qxf7 27 Qxd7 and White should win without too many headaches) 22 Bh3 Rcd8 23 fxe4 with a decisive advantage for White.

a2) 16 ... Nd5! 17 Bxg7 Qxg7 18 Re1 (or 18 Re2 Qf7 19 Re4 Rc6 20 Bb5 Rb6 21 Ba4 Nf4 22 Bb3 d5 and Black enjoyed a good position in L.Oll-Ki.Georgiev, Biel 1993) 18 ... Rxf3 19 Bg2 Rf7 20 Bxd5 exd5 21 Qxd5 Qf6 22 h5 Qf4+ 23 Rd2 Rc5 24 Qxd6 Qxd6 25 Rxd6 gxh5 26 gxh5 Rxh5 with an endgame that should end in a draw, J.Hector-A.Smith, Falun 2012.

b) 11 ... Rc8!? is an interesting new idea as after 12.h4 (or 12 0-0-0 Nxd5 13 exd5 Bxd4 14 Qxd4 Qc7 15 c3 Bd7 16 h4 Qa5 17 a3 Qc5 and Black appears to have equalised) 12 ... Nxd5 13 Bxg7, Black plays 13 ... Ne3! 14 Qxe3 Kxg7 and he is doing remarkably well following 15 Bd3 Qa5+ 16 c3 Qc5 17 Qd2 h6, Wang Jue-M.Arabidze, Moscow 2014 when Black has a comfortable position.

11 ... Qa5

The logical continuation to commence queenside play.

Question: How does White continue if Black tries to slow down the h-pawn charge with the standard ... h7-h5 block?

Answer: After 11 ... h5, a powerful continuation is 12 Nd5! (this incidentally prevents ... Qa5) and in order to prevent the h-file from being opened immediately, Black must trade off the knight with 12 ... Bxd5 13 exd5 and White can leisurely attack the Black kingside after 0-0-0 and Bd3. If Black reacts with 13 ... Qd7 14 0-0-0 e5 15 dxe6 Qxe6, White can calmly play 16 Kb1 hxg4 15 Bd3 with a tremendous attack in progress. For example, 15 ... gxf3 is met by 16 h5 with an enduring initiative.

12 h5 Rfc8 13 a3

Another attempt is 13 h6 Bh8 14 g5 Nh5 15 Bxh8 Kxh8 16 0-0-0 Rxc3?! (too ambitious a try as Black should have played 16 ... Bxa2 17 Qd4+ f6 18 f4 Bf7 19 gxf6 Nxf6 20 Rh3 Rab8 with a complicated position and chances to both sides) 17 Qxc3+ Qxc3 18 bxc3 Bxa2 19 e5! with a convincing advantage for

White in the endgame, V.Kupreichik-B.Bozinovic, Oberwart 2002.

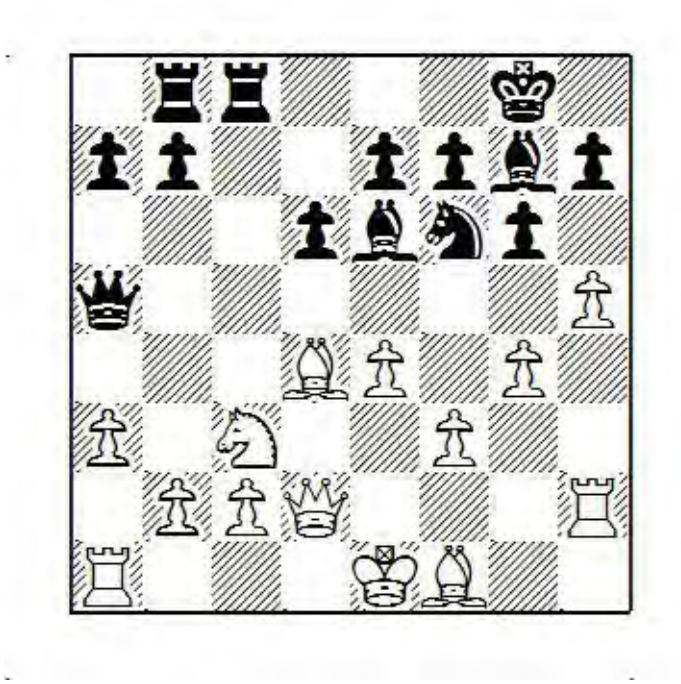
13 ... Rab8

Considering that Black is a full tempo down on the main lines covered in the next couple of games, it would seem reasonable to try to change the nature of the game a bit by not playing standard main line moves. Two such attempts are:

a) 13 ... Bc4 14 h6 Bh8 15 g5 Nh5 16 Bxh8 Kxh8 was tried in T.Fogarasi-K.Szalai, Budapest 2013, and 17 Qd4+ Qe5 18 Qxe5+ dxe5 19 0-0-0 would leave us with a position where only White can be better.

b) 13 ... b5 14 h6 (if White takes the pawn, Black is possibly okay, for instance 14 Nxb5 Qxd2+ 15 Kxd2 a6 16 h6 Bh8 17 g5 axb5 18 gxf6 Rcb8 19 Rd1 Bxf6 20 Bxf6 exf6 and Black may be able to defend this slightly worse endgame) 14 ... Bh8 15 g5 b4 16 Na2 (now, of course the b-pawn is pinned) 16 ... Nd7 (a fun, but possibly unsound alternative is 16 ... Nxe4!? 17 fxe4 Rxc2! 18 Qxc2 Bxd4 19 Nxb4 Qxg5 20 Qg2 Qe3+ 21 Be2 Bxb2 22 Rd1 Qxa3 23 Nd5 Bxd5 24 Rxd5 e6 and while Black only has three pawns for the rook, then the presence of the opposite coloured bishops and the fact that White's king really has nowhere to hide offer Black some (though insufficient) measure of counterplay and hope) 17 axb4 Qc7 18 Nc3 Ne5 19 Be2 Nc4 20 Bxc4 Qxc4 21 Bxh8 Kxh8 22 Ra4! Bd7 23 b5 and Black is a pawn down without a shadow of compensation so White should win rather easily, V.Kupreichik-I.Starostits, Bled 2002.

14 Rh2!?



Question: This move looks artificial so what is White really up to?

Answer: By once again delaying queenside castling as long as possible, Black's attack on the queenside is not likely to succeed without a target (a king to attack). In addition, Rh2 is likely to be useful as it prepares for White to double on the h-file and it helps guard the second rank.

White needs to examine 14 hxg6 a little closer:

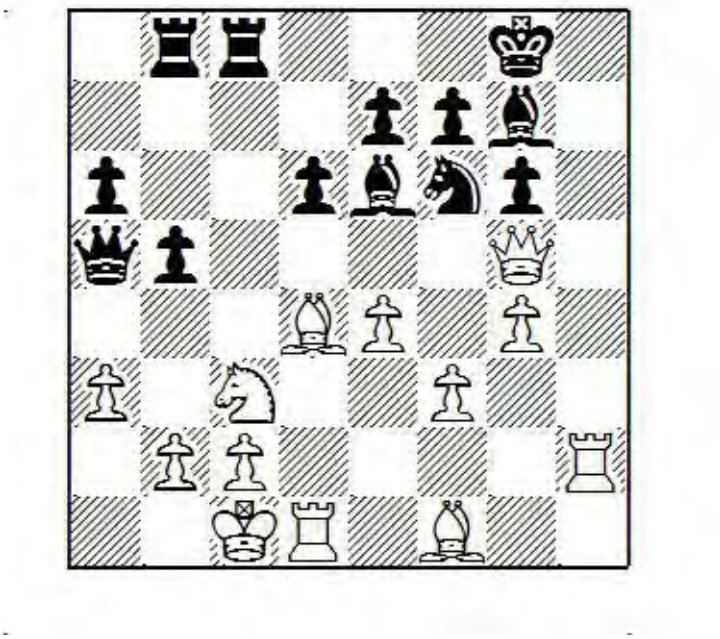
a) 14 ... hxg6 15 Bd3 (15 0-0-0 b5 transposes to positions similar to those we will look at in the next main games and 15 Qh2!? b5 16 b4 Qd8 17 Rd1 Rb7 18 Nxb5 is an unusual position for a Dragon though it looks quite pleasant for White, L.Jarmula-K.Dragun, Warsaw 2013) 15 ... Bc4 16 0-0-0 b5 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Nd5 and White has better chances, A.Istratescu-S.Gachet, France 2009, especially after 19 ... Qxd2+ 20 Rxd2 Kg7 21 Rdh2 Rbc8 22 c3 Kf8 23 Nxf6 exf6 with a playable, but somewhat uncomfortable endgame for Black.

b) 14 ... fxg6 worked out well for Black in V.Gunina-N.Pogonina, Smolensk 2007. After 15 g5 Nh5 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 f4 and now 17 ... Nxf4! 18 Qxf4 Rxc3! 19 0-0-0 Rbc8! would have been good for Black. But simply 15 Rh2 is a good improvement for White.

14 ... a6

Unfortunately for Black, this is a bit of a necessity. The immediate 14 ... b5 can be met with 15 b4 Qd8 (15 ... Qa6 16 a4 is no better) 16 Nxb5 a6 17 Nc3 Bc4 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 g5 Nh5 20 Bxg7 Bxf1 21 Kxf1 Kxg7 22 Nd5 and Black has insufficient compensation.

15 hxg6 hxg6 16 0-0-0 b5 17 Qg5!



We have seen this motif in the 9 0-0-0 line and it hampers ... b5-b4 and prepares Qh4.

In a very instructive game, White played for the ending with 17 Nd5 Qxd2+ 18 Rdxd2 Bxd5 19 Bxf6? (better was 19 exd5 Nd7 20 g5 Nc5 21 Kb1 b4 22 b3 bxa3 23 Ka2 a5 24 Kxa3 e5 25 dxe6 Nxe6 26 Bxg7 Kxg7 27 Rxd6 Nxg5 with a tricky endgame where I prefer White) 19 ... Bxf6 20 Rxd5 Be5 21 Rh1 Kg7 22 Be2 Kf6 23 c3 e6 24 Rdd1 a5 25 Kb1 b4 26 cxb4 axb4 27 a4 b3 28 Rc1, J.Egoroff-G.Vescovi, Puoso Alegre 1997, and now best was 28 ... Rxc1+ 29 Rxc1 Rh8 with a problematic endgame for White.

17 ... d5

This is an important juncture and Black has a couple of important alternatives at this point:

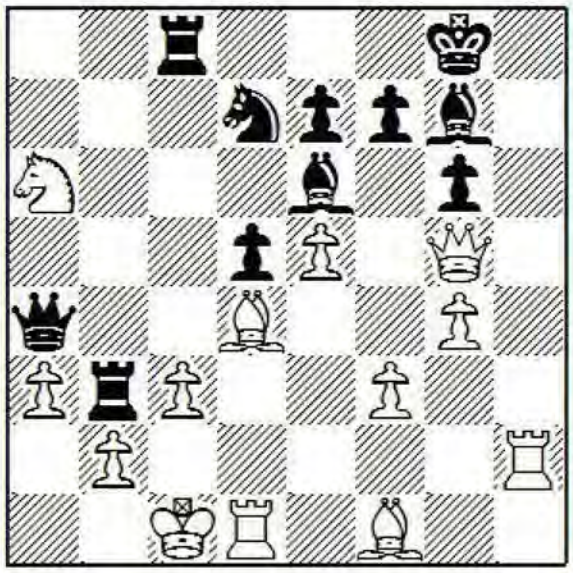
a) 17 ... Rb7!? 18 Bd3 (or 18 Kb1 Rbc7 19 Nd5 Bxd5 20 exd5 Qa4 followed by ... b5-b4 looks nice for Black) 18 ... Bc4 19 Bxc4 Rxc4 20 Nd5 (my computer likes 20 Ne2 Qa4 21 Nc3 Qa5, repeating the moves for a draw – I guess I have been studying too many grandmaster draws lately ...) 20 ... Rxd4 21 Rxd4 Nxd5 22 Qxd5 Bxd4 23 Qxd4 Qe1+ and Black is obviously doing fine.

b) 17 ... Bc4?! 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 Nd5 Rxd4 20 Nxe7+ Kf8 21 Rxd4 (White should have played 21 Nxg6+ fxg6 22 Rxd4 Qe1+ 23 Rd1 Qg3 24 Rhd2 with clearly better chances) 21 ... Kxe7 22 c3 Rc8 and Black is by no means worse, Y.Gonzalez Vidal-C.Sanhueza, Montevideo 2015.

18 e5 Nd7 19 Na2 b4 20 Nxb4 Qa4 21 Nxa6?!

This is inaccurate. More precise is 21 f4 Nc5 22 Bxc5 Rxc5 23 Qxe7 and it is game over for Black.

21 ... Rb3 22 c3?



This lets Black off the hook and into the game. Instead White should have played 22 Kb1! Rxf3 23 Nb4 Rxa3 (or 23 ... Rg3 24 Qh4 Rxg4 25 Qh7+ Kf8 26 Bh3 Rxd4 27 Rxd4 Qa7 28 Rhd2 and Black's position is falling apart very rapidly) 24 bxa3 Qxa3 25 Qxe7 Rb8 26 c3 Qb3+ 27 Kc1 Qa3+ 28 Rb2 Bxg4 29 e6 Bxe6 and while White has an extra rook, Black has some counterplay (because White doesn't have much a shield around the king) which is nevertheless insufficient.

22 ... Nb6??

A dreadful blunder after which Black almost loses by force. I suppose Black intended to play ... Nc4 and then sacrifice the knight, but this is entirely too slow.

Black should instead have thrown all of his presently available muscle into the attack, and that may actually have been sufficient with 22 ... Rbxc3+! 23 bxc3 Qxa3+ 24 Rb2 Nxe5:

a) 25 Kb1 Nxf3 26 Qf4 Bxd4 27 Rxd4 Nxd4 28 cxd4 Ra8! 29 Rb8+ Rxb8+ 30 Qxb8+ Kg7 31 Qe5+ Kg8 32 Nc5 Bxg4 and Black should actually be able to hold the draw.

b) The question is, what happens if Black takes on e5? The funny thing is Black has an amazing reply ready after 25 Bxe5 with 25 ... d4! 26 Bxg7 dxc3 27 Bxc3 Rxc3+ 28 Kb1 Ba2+ 29 Rxa2 Qb3+ 30 Rb2 Qxd1+ with a draw by perpetual. I will not be surprised that Black missed this.

23 Nb4!

Now Black's attack is dead in the water, and White's is about to gain steam.

23 ... Rxb4 24 axb4 Qxb4 25 Rc2

White possibly had an even stronger option available in 25 Ba6, which clears the path for the rook to head to h1. After25 ... Rc7 26 Kb1 Qb3 27 Rdh1 Na4 28 Qh4 f5 29 exf6 exf6 30 Bd3, White is threatening Qh8+, followed by Bxg6 with a clear kill.

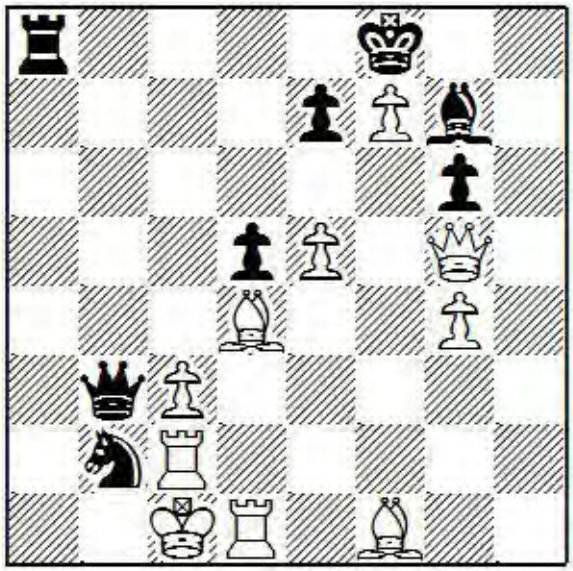
25 ... Qb3 26 f4

This move reveals the level of Black's worries. The f-pawn will be the battering ram to bash through Black's defences.

26 ... Na4

If 26 ... Ra8, then 27 Kd2 Nc4+ 28 Bxc4 dxc4 29 f5 Bd5 30 fxg6 fxg6 31 Qxg6, and Black's position is collapsing.

27 f5 Nxb2 28 fxe6 Ra8 29 exf7+ Kf8



30 Bc5??

Threatening mate and terribly logical. However, in fact it loses! Instead 30 Kd2! Nxd1 31 Qxg6 wins.

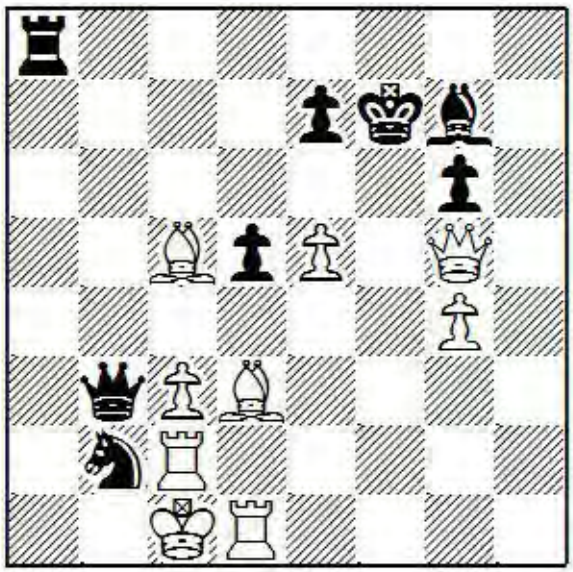
30 ... Kxf7??

Possibly already thinking the battle lost, Black may just have gone through the motions instead of keeping his nose in the water for valid chances. Black should have played 30 ... Ra1+ 31 Kd2 Rxd1+ 32 Ke3 d4+! 33 Kf2 Qxf7+ 34 Kg3 Rxf1 and all of a sudden, Black is a piece up and is threatening mate.

31 Bd3??

Throwing the win away again.

Instead 31 Ba6! (blocking the black rook and opening the f- and h-files for the white rooks) should have been played. Now it is over for Black.



31 ... Nxd1??

Again, 31 ... Ra1+ should have been played and after 32 Kd2 Rxd1+ 33 Ke2 Rxd3 34 Qxe7+ Kg8 35 Qd8+ Kh7 36 Qh4+, a draw by perpetual check is reached.

32 Qxg6+

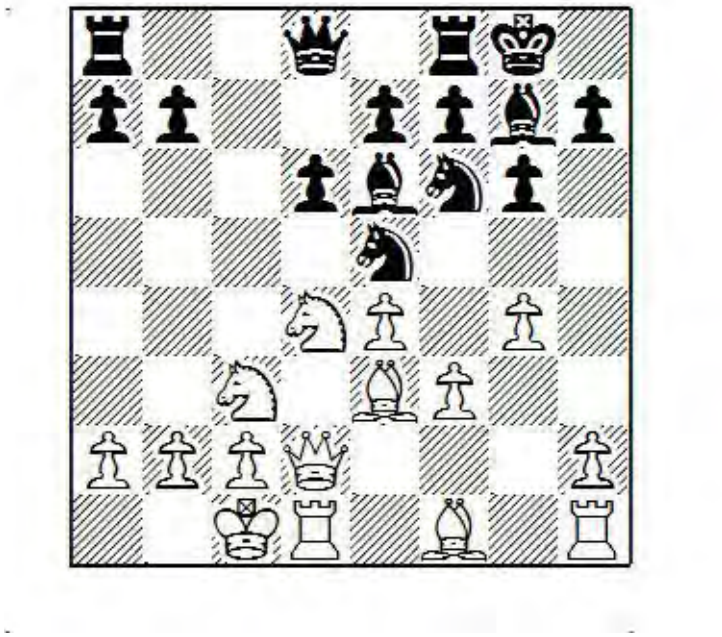
The faster win was 32 Qxe7+ Kg8 33 Qe6+ Kh7 34 Rh2+ with mate in a few moves.

32 ... Kg8 33 Qh7+ Kf7 34 Bg6+ Kf8 35 Bxe7+ Kxe7 36 Qxg7+ Ke6 37 Bf5 mate! 1-0

Game 41
L.Shytaj-Ki.Georgiev
Italian Team Ch, Spoleto 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 f3 Bg7 7 Be3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 g4 Be6! 10 0-0-0 Nxd4

Black has tried to inject a little excitement by playing 10 ... Ne5!?.



This doesn't have the best of reputations though it may be somewhat playable:

a) 11 Nxe6 fxe6 transposes to Game 43.

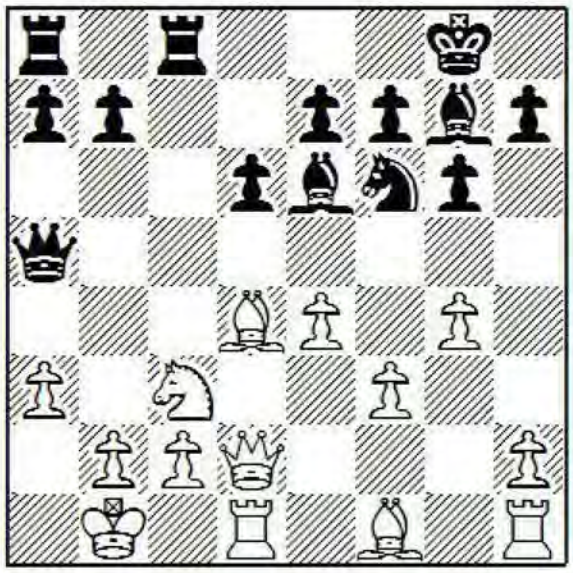
b) 11 h4 Bc4 12 Bh3 Ba6 13 b3 Qa5 14 Kb1 Qa3?! (14 ... Rfc8!? looks okay for Black and after 15 Na4 Qxd2 16 Bxd2 Nc6 17 Nxc6 Rxc6 18 g5 Nh5. while White has more space and Black should be okay) 15 g5 Nh5 16 f4 Nc6 17 Bg4 Nb4? (Black's best is 17 ... Nxd4, but this is hardly a dream come true following 18 Bxd4 Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Nxf4 20 e5 Qc5 21 exd6 Qxd6 22 Qxd6 exd6 23 Rd4 Ne6 24 Bxe6 fxe6 25 Rxd6 with a very unpleasant endgame for Black) 18 Bxh5 gxh5 19 Nf5 Rfe8?! 20 Nxg7 Kxg7 21 Qd4+ e5 22 Qxd6 Rac8 23 Qf6+ Kg8 24 Rd7 Rf8 25 g6 and facing unavoidable mate, Black resigned in V.Anand-A.Mestel, London 1985.

c) 11 g5 is possibly best and after 11 ... Nh5 12 f4 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Bxc4 14 f5 Re8 15 Kb1 Rc8 16 Nd5 (two alternatives are 16 b3 Ba6 17 Nd5 b6 18 c4 e6 19 fxe6 fxe6 20 Nc3 Qe7 21 Ndb5 Red8 with a complicated struggle ahead or 16 Nce2 e5 17 Nb3 d5 18 exd5 Nf4 19 Nc3 Qxg5 20 fxg6 hxg6 with unbalanced play) 16 ... e6 17 Nc3 Qa5 18 f6 Bf8 19 Nb3 Qc7 20 Qf2 b5 with chances to both sides, S.Dolmatov-M.Petursson, Marseille 1988.

11 Bxd4 Qa5 12 Kb1

White also plays 12 a3 with great frequency, but it is often a matter of transposing into our main line. Another line runs 12 ... Rab8 13 h4 (13 Kb1 Rfc8 just transposes to the line in our main game) 13 ... b5 14 Nd5 Qxd2+ 15 Rxd2 Bxd5 16 exd5 a6 17 Bh3 Rb7 18 Re1 Rfb8 19 g5 Nh5 20 Bg4 Bxd4 and a draw was agreed in P.Czarnota-V.Gashimov, Cappelle la Grande 2008. This is clearly not the heartstopping excitement that most Dragon players enjoy, but it is unfortunately one possibility for White.

12 ... Rfc8 13 a3



We have arrived at the established main line.

Question: Is this move really necessary?

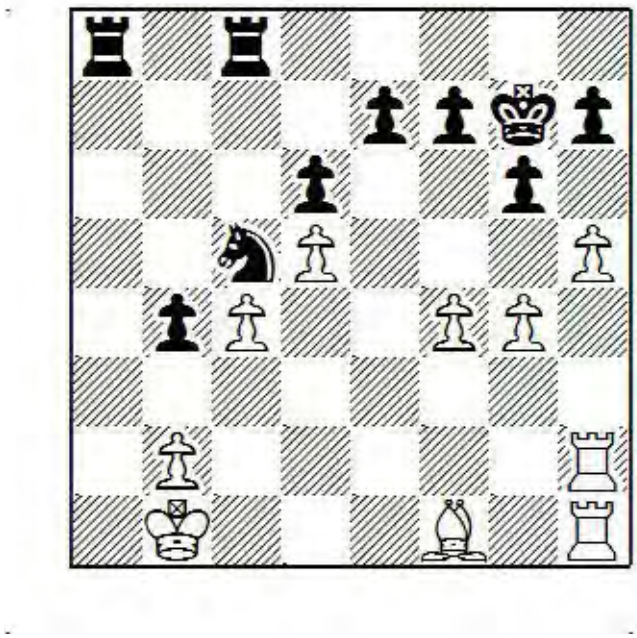
Answer: The primary reason for White's cautious move in our main game is that after 13 h4?!, he runs into a bit of a firestorm after 13 ... Rxc3! 14 Qxc3 Qxa2+ 15 Kc1 Bxg4! 16 fxg4 (trying to run away with the king will not help White as after 16 Kd2?! Rc8 17 Qe3 Nxe4+ 18 Qxe4 Bf5 19 Qe3 Rxc2+ 20 Ke1 Qa5+ 21 Bc3 Bxc3+ 22 bxc3 Rxc3 23 Qd2 Qe5+ 24 Be2 Rc2, it is game over, G.Dorenberg-L.Riemersma, Enschede 1992) 16 ... Qa1+ 17 Kd2 Nxe4+ 18 Ke1 Nxc3 19 Rxa1 Bxd4 20 Bg2 Nb5 and now 21 c3 (21 Kf1 is worse as after 21 ... Rb8 22 Ra4 Bb6 23 g5 Nd4 24 c3 Nf5 25 Ke1 e6, Black is obviously in very good shape here with three pawns for the exchange and eventually went on to win, K.Dabrowska-V.Shishkin, Polanica Zdroj 1994) 21 ... Nxc3! 22 bxc3 Bxc3+ 23 Ke2 Bxa1 24 Rxa1 a5 25 Bxb7 Rb8 and while Black is not winning by force, he is certainly the only one who can play for a win, W.Kozlowski-B.Grabarczyk, Slupsk 1989.

However, White can try 13 g5 Nh5 (13 ... Rxc3 is not as effective here as after 14 Qxc3 Qxa2+ 15 Kc1 Rc8 16 Qa3 Qxa3 17 bxa3 Nd7, White should just exchange on g7 and the weakened white pawn structure will compensate for the exchange, J.Dostan-B.Revesz, Gyula 1996) 14 Nd5 Qxd2 15 Rxd2 Bxd5 16 exd5 Rc7 17 Rg1 Bxd4 18 Rxd4 Rf8 19 Bh3 f6 20 Bg4 Ng7 and chances are even, although I prefer Black's chances on account of the more flexible pawn structure, K.Schmitzer-J.Fleck, Germany 1995.

13 ... Rab8 14 g5

Let's have a look at other tries:

a) Another move that has frequently been played is 14 h4 b5, and with Black's attack about to make landfall in front of White's king, he has to play 15 Nd5 Qxd2 16 Rxd2 (16 Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Rxd2 Bxd4 18 Rxd4 h6 19 Kc1 Kg7 20 Kd2 g5 21 c3 a6 22 Ke3 Rh8 with even chances in the endgame, J.Borisek-P.Carlsson, Istanbul 2012) 16 ... Bxd5 17 exd5 a5 (or 17 ... Rc7 18 h5 Nd7 19 hxg6 hxg6 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Rdh2 Nf6 22 g5 Nh5 23 f4 Rc5 and we have another approximately equal endgame on our hands, one that Black eventually managed to win in C.Lhagvasuren-S.Tiviakov, Cheliabinsk 1990) 18 c3 Nd7 19 f4 Nc5 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 h5 b4 22 axb4 (22 cxb4?! axb4 more or less forces White to go for 23 a4 Nxa4 24 Rdh2 Rh8 25 h6+ Kf8 26 g5 Nc5 27 Bh3 f5 and White certainly does not have enough for the lost pawn, B.Jobava-L.Le Quang, Moscow 2008) 22 ... axb4 23 c4 Ra8 24 Rdh2.

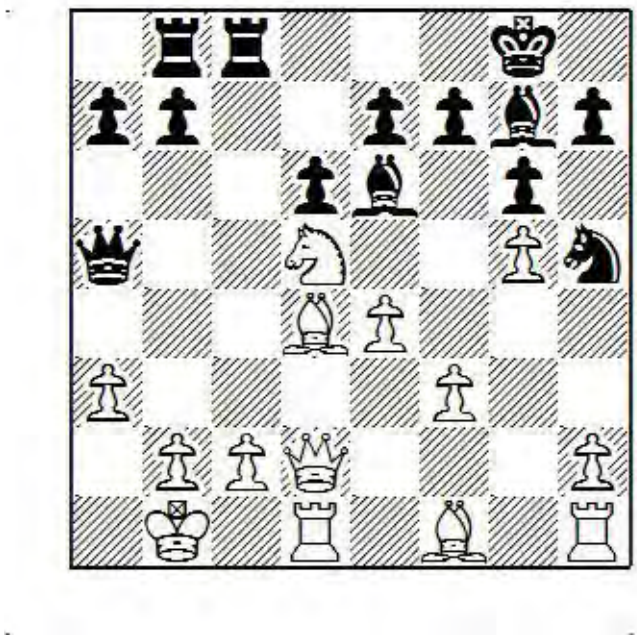


Exercise: What is Black's best move?

Answer: Black should play the pawn sacrifice 24 ... g5! to nix White's kingside initiative. All of a sudden, the rooks look misplaced on the h-file. Black's knight is obviously stronger than White's f1-bishop which does not have much of a future. After 25 fxg5 b3 26 Rh3 Rc7 (preparing to double the rooks on the a-file and start an irresistible invasion) 27 Kc1 Rb7 (the immediate 27 ... Ra1+ is less effective as 28 Kd2 Rb1 29 Kc3 Na4+ 30 Kd4 Rxb2 31 Bd3 Rg2 32 Bf5 Nb6 33 h6+ Kg8 34 Rc3, White is still playing) 28 g6 Ne4 (threatening mate and thus winning material) 29 Bd3 (my computer wants White to play 29 h6+ Kxg6 30 Kd1 Nf2+ 31 Kd2 Nxh3 32 Rxh3 Kg5 but while it is a better chance, it does not offer much hope and Black should win) 29 ... Ra1+ 30 Bb1 Rb4 31 h6+ Kxg6 32 Re1 Rxc4+ 33 Rc3 Rxb1+ 34 Kxb1 Nxc3+ 35 bxc3 Rxc3 36 Rxe7 Rf3 37 Rd7 Rf6 38 Kb2 Kxh6 39 Kxb3 Kg5 and White resigned in A.Mammadov-G.Guseinov, Nakhchivan 2012.

b) When White plays 14 Nd5, it is going to take a lot of the tension out of the game with 14 ... Qxd2 15 Rxd2 (or 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Rxd2 Bxd4 17 Rxd4 with a draw agreed in R.Milu-V.Jianu, Brasov 2011) 15 ... Nxd5 16 Bxg7 Ne3 and the players agreed to a draw, V.Anand-G.Kasparov, New York 1995. Not much excitement for a world championship match game.

14 ... Nh5 15 Nd5



While this move is bordering on unsportsmanlike conduct, White really does not have much of a choice. For instance, after 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Bd3 b5 17 Ne2?! (17 Rhe1 Nf4 18 Nd5 Qxd2 19 Rxd2 Bxd5

20 exd5 Rb7 and Black is obviously comfortable) 17 ... b4 18 Nd4 Qc5 19 Nxe6+ fxe6 20 a4 Rf8, Black has completely taken over control of the game, I.Sukandar-D.Nguyen, Jakarta 2012.

15 ... Qxd2 16 Rxd2 Bxd5 17 exd5 a6

Black has some alternatives, neither of which are likely to cause rapid heartbeat:

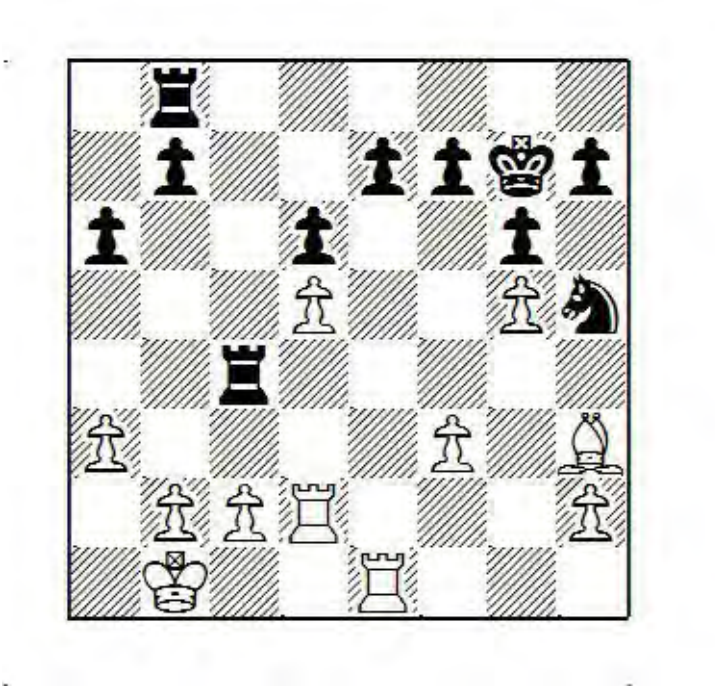
a) 17 ... Bxd4 18 Rxd4 h6 (18 ... Rc7 19 Bh3 Ng7 20 Re1 h6 21 f4 h5 22 Ree4 Nf5 23 Bxf5 gxf5 24 Rc4 Rbc8 25 Rxc7 Rxc7, with an equal endgame where neither side is likely to have any luck to tip the apple-cart, D.Kononenko-A.Tukhaev, Lvov 2007) 19 Bh3 Rc7 20 Bg4 Ng7 21 h4 hxg5 22 hxg5 Rf8 23 Rd2 f5 24 gxf6 Rxf6 and the chances are about even, but this is about as exciting as it is likely to get, L.Rodi-D.Fernando, Natal 2009.

b) 17 ... b6 18 Rg1 Rc7 19 Rg4 Rf8 20 Be3 f6 21 gxf6 Bxf6 and while the chances are about equal and White has the bishop pair, I would prefer Black, L.Milman-S.Kudrin, San Diego 2004.

18 Bh3

In an early game of Karpov where he won a nice endgame with 18 Rg1, Black was actually doing fine early on with 18 ... b5 19 c3 a5 20 Ba7 Rb7 21 Be3 Be5 22 Ka2 Rcc7 23 Kb3 Rb8 24 Bd3 Nf4 and chances are about equal, A.Karpov-J.Dueball, Skopje 1972.

18 ... Rc4 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Re1

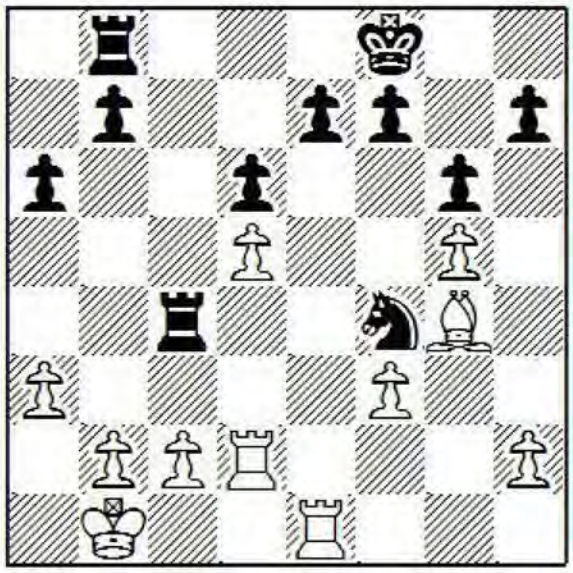


20 ... Kf8

An interesting alternative is 20 ... Rh4!? 21 Bd7 (or 21 Bg4 Kf8 22 Rde2 Re8 23 Bd7 Nf4 24 Re4 Rd8, leading to a position somewhat similar to our main line) 21 ... Kf8 22 Rde2 Nf4 23 Rxe7 Ne6 24 Rxf7+ Kxf7 25 Bxe6+ Kf8 26 h3 Re8 27 Re3 Rxh3 28 Rb3 Rh1+ 29 Ka2 Re7 30 Rb6 Rh2 31 Rxd6 Rxc2 32 Rd8+ Re8 33 Rd7 Re7 with a draw.

21 Bg4 Ng7

Black is settling for a draw, perhaps realising that even with his best effort and his extra 200 rating point differential, he will not be able to grind down an opponent determined to get a draw. In my opinion, if Black really wanted to give it a try, then 21 ... Nf4 would be worth a shot.



After 22 Re4 Rxe4 23 fxe4 f6 24 gxf6 exf6, the game is still alive. The f4-knight might be either be a nuisance to White or it might not amount to anything serious.

22 Re4 Rc7 23 Rf4 Kg8 24 Re2 Re8 25 Rfe4 Kf8 26 Rf4

Ensuring that there will be no ... f7-f6 or ... f7-f5 business though the f-pawn advance isn't much of a winning attempt anyway.

26 ... Kg8 27 Rfe4 Kf8 28 Rf4 Kg8 ½-½

A truce was declared since White intends to repeat moves anyway.

Game 42
A.Akhmetov-A.Salem
Kocaeli 2013

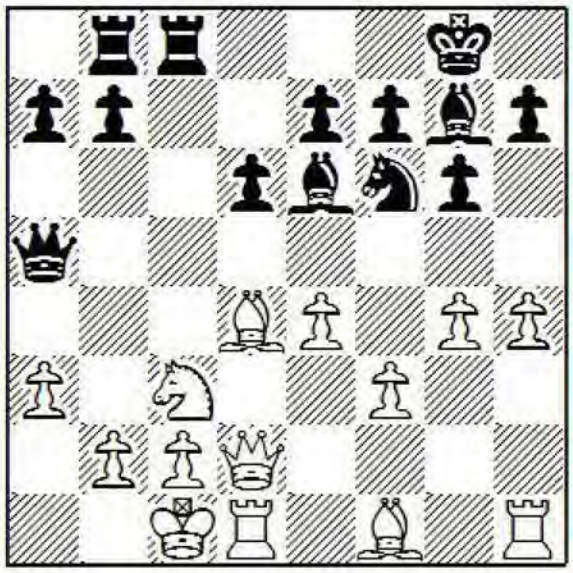
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 g4 Nxd4

As previously indicated in Game 40, the more accurate move order is 9 ... Be6 first.

10 Bxd4 Qa5 11 0-0-0

The move order 11 h4! and only after 11 ... Be6 then 11 h5 is perhaps more accurate, transposing into Game 40.

11 ... Be6 12 a3 Rfc8 13 h4 Rab8



14 h5

Question: Doesn't this look similar to the first game in this chapter?

Answer: It certainly does, but it is the small differences that matter.

White also has other though less forceful tries:

a) As we have seen in Szabo-Skytte earlier in this chapter, the move 14 Rh2 can come in pretty handy for White. Here, however, White has already castled queenside and therefore its impact is significantly lesser. For instance, 14 ... b5 15 Nd5 Qxd2+ 16 Rhxd2 Bxd5 17 exd5 Nd7! (not bothering to guard the a-pawn because of an elegant resource on move 19) 18 Bxa7 Ra8 19 Bd4 b4! 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Be2 bxa3 22 b3 Rc3 23 Kb1 Nc5 and Black was clearly doing well at this point, V.Ivanchuk-G.Jones, Warsaw 2010.

b) The normal idea 14 Nd5 Qxd2+ 15 Rxd2 is pretty harmless in this rendition after 15 ... Bxd5 16 exd5 b5 17 g5 (once again on 17 Bxa7?!, Black can regain the pawn with 17 ... Ra8 18 Bd4 b4) 17 ... Nh5 18 Rg1 f6! (18 ... b4!? also looks promising) 19 Bh3 f5 20 Rgd1 b4 21 axb4 Rxb4 22 c3 Bxd4 23 Rxd4 Rcc4 and Black has the initiative and the better chances in the endgame, V.Jansa-C.Ward, Isle Of Man 1998.

14 ... b5 15 hxg6

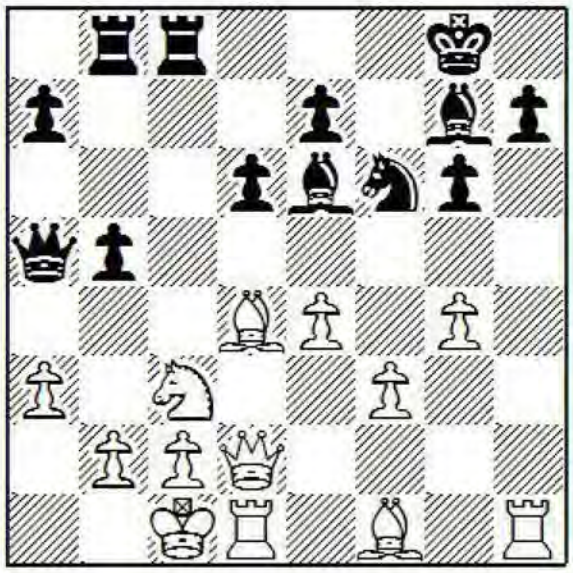
The positional treatment (trying to claim a large space advantage before forcing a queen exchange with Nd5) with 15 h6 is best met by 15 ... b4 16 hxg7 bxa3 17 Nb5 Rxb5 18 Bxb5 Qxb5 19 bxa3 Qa4 when Black has decent compensation for the exchange, A.Zude-L.Riemersma, Germany 1996.

15 ... hxg6

Let's examine the other options:

a) 15 ... b4?! looks tempting, but it has been established that White is much better, if not winning after 16 gxh7+ Kh8 17 Nb1 and now Black's only chance to keep the pot boiling is 17 ... Ne8!?, but after 18 Qe3 Bxd4 19 Qxd4+ Nf6 20 Rd2 (White cannot be completely complacent as Black may find his way back into the game after 20 Bd3 Ba2 21 a4 b3 22 c3 Rb4 23 Qe3 Rxa4 24 g5 Nd7 and Black still is not out of the game) 20 ... Ba2 21 a4 Bb3 22 Bd3 and White has a rather significant advantage.

b) Black has also tried 15 ... fxg6!? to unbalance the pawns a bit and allow some different defensive options for Black.



Now White has a variety of choices available:

b1) 16 g5 b4! 17 Nb5 Nh5 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Qd4+ Kg8 20 axb4 Qa4 21 Nc3 Qxb4 22 Qxb4 Rxb4 was perfectly fine for Black in R.Mayer-B.Jaderholm, correspondence 2006.

b2) 16 Nd5 Qxd2+ 17 Rxd2 Bxd5 18 exd5 b4 19 axb4 Rxb4 and here 20 c3 is met by 20 ... Ne4 21 Ba6 Rc7 22 fxe4 Bxd4 23 Kc2 Be5 and Black has successfully solved his opening problems, I.Georgiadis-S.Filippas, Rio 2013.

b3) 16 Qg5 and now we have another fork in the road:

b31) 16 ... Rb7 17 Rd2 a6 18 Nd5 Bxd5 19 exd5 b4 20 Qe3 Qxd5 21 Bxf6 Qa2 22 Bc4+ Qxc4 23 Bxg7 Qa2! 24 b3 e5 25 Bxe5 Re7 26 Qd4 dxe5 27 Qb2 Qxa3 28 Rhd1 Qxb2+ 29 Kxb2 Rc3 and Black has winning chances, M.Herrera-A.Almeida Saenz, Mexico 1996.

b32) 16 ... Bc4? 17 Bxc4+ Rxc4 18 Nd5 (Black's position is already collapsing) 18 ... Rxd4 19 Rxd4 Nxd5 20 Qxd5+ Kh8 21 Qf7 g5 22 Rd2 b4 23 Rxh7+ and Black, facing mate, resigned in T.Sammalvuo-E.Forsaa, Copenhagen 2004.

b33) 16 ... Qc7 17 e5 dxe5 18 Bxe5 Qc5 19 Bxf6 exf6 20 Rd8+ and Black resigned in H.Omar-A.Kassis, Beirut 1998.

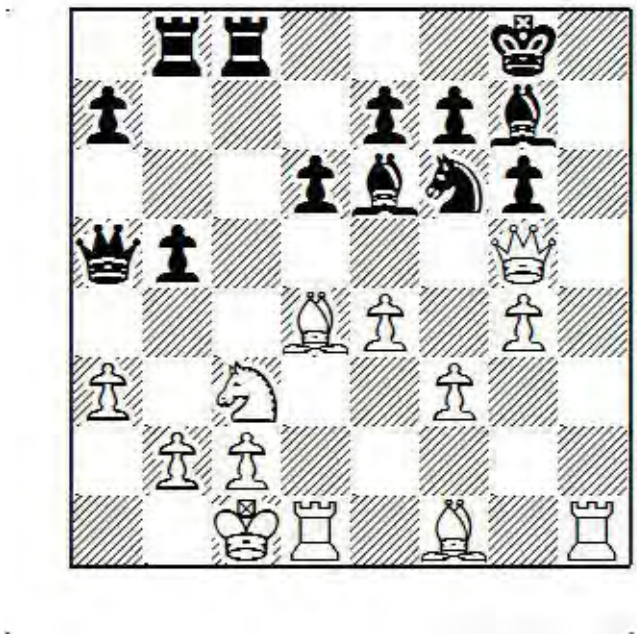
b34) 16 ... Bf7!? 17 Nd5! Bxd5 18 Bxf6 Bxe4?! (stronger is Vigorito's suggestion of 18 ... b4! 19 Rxd5 exf6 20 Qd2 (20 Rxa5 fxg5 is accurately assessed by Vigorito as a likely draw) 20 ... Qa4 21 Rd4 Qb3! and Black is fine) 19 fxe4 Bxf6 (19 ... Rc5 20 Qh4 exf6 21 Qxh7+ Kf8 22 e5! opening files and diagonals for White's pieces is very unpleasant for Black) 20 Qd5+ Kg7 was seen in A.Toth-Pham Minh Hoang, Budapest 1998 and now 21 e5 Bg5+ 22 Kb1 h6 23 exd6 has Black is hanging on by a very ugly thread.

16 g5

White can also head for the endgame or send his queen to the kingside:

a) The boring 16 Nd5 should naturally also be explored and after 16 ... Qxd2+ 17 Rxd2 Nxd5?! (this is too passive and more accurate is 17 ... Bxd5 18 exd5 b4 19 a4 Nd7 and Black has no problems) 18 exd5 Bxd4 19 Rxd4 Bd7 20 g5 Kg7 21 Rdh4, White has a pleasant game with enduring pressure on Black's position, R.Mainka-A.Kalka, Recklinghausen 2001.

b) A key option for White is once again the thematic 16 Qg5.

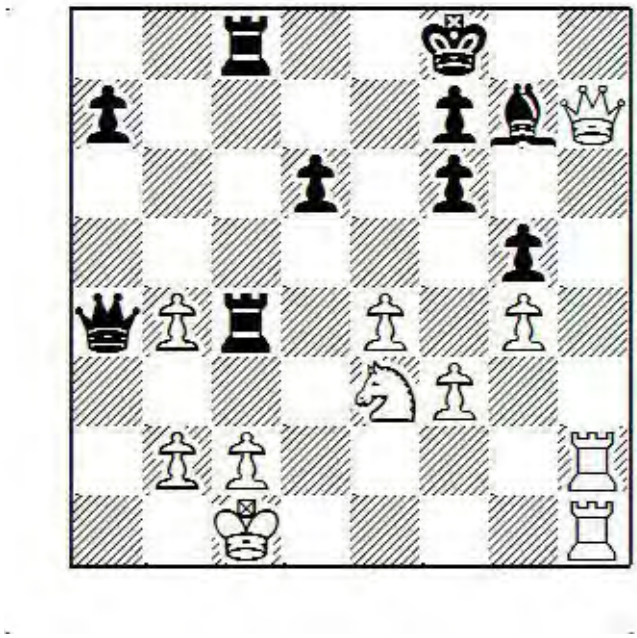


Black has succumbed to this quite badly in a number of games. But despair not as Black has a playable option that have largely gone untried:

b1) 16 ... Qc7?! 17 e5 dxe5 18 Bxe5 Qc6 19 Qf4 Rb7 20 Bd3 Rd7 21 Bxb5 Rxd1+ 22 Rxd1 Qb6 23 Qd4 and Black is a pawn down without the shadow of compensation, M.Pavlov-A.Muromtsev, Alushta 2003.

b2) 16 ... Nh7 is a suggestion by Vigorito, but I have my doubts about this move. Best seems 17 Qe3 Nf6 (17 ... Bxd4 18 Rxd4 b4 19 axb4 Qa1+ 20 Kd2 Qxb2 21 Ba6 Bb3 22 Rc1 and White has the upper hand) 18 e5 Nxg4 19 fxg4 b4 20 Nb5 bxa3 21 Qxa3 Rxb5 22 Bxb5 Qxb5 23 exd6 Bxg4 24 Qd3 leaving Black with inadequate compensation for the exchange.

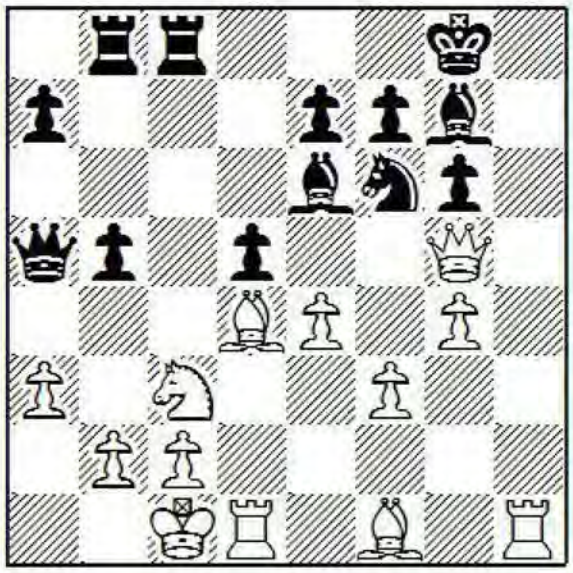
b3) 16 ... Bc4? 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Nd5 Qd8 19 Bxf6 exf6 20 Qh4 (after this simple move, almost any resistance is futile) 20 ... Rbc8 21 Rd2 Kf8 22 Rdh2 (the threat is Qxg7+ with mate to follow, using the rooks) 22 ... g5 23 Qh7 b4 (pure desperation, but 23 ... Qd7 24 Ne3 followed by Nf5 is devastating) 24 axb4 Qd7 25 Ne3 Qa4.



Question: How does White finish with the fastest flourish?

Answer: 26 Qxg7+! and Black resigned in E.Safarli-V.Durarbeyli, Gaziantep 2008.

b4) The narrow way to Black's salvation is to nullify the Qg5 pin on the b-pawn with 16 ... d5!.



Black's idea is to force ... b5-b4 through:

b41) Ironically, if White captures the d5-pawn with 17 exd5, it gets pinned (instead of the b-pawn) after 17 ... b4 and Black dominates after 18 Nb1 Qa4 19 Rd2 Bxd5.

b42) 17 Qe3 b4 18 axb4 Rxb4 is even better for Black.

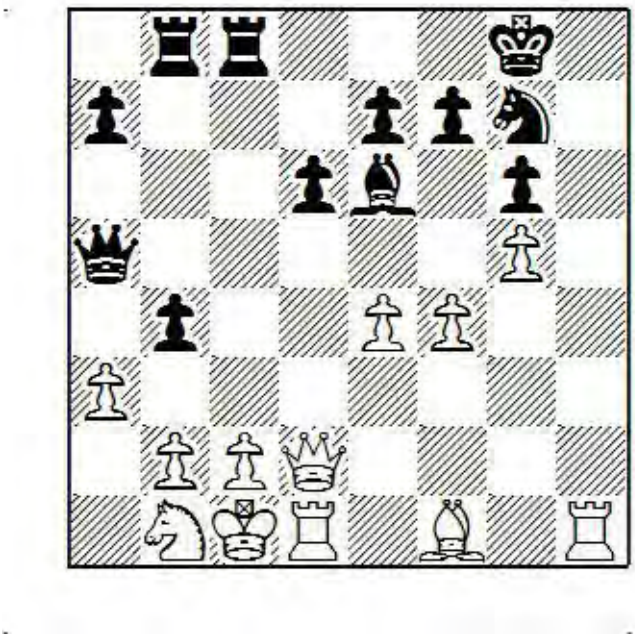
b43) 17 e5 Nd7 18 Bd3?! (18 Kb1 b4 19 axb4 Rxb4 20 Qe3 runs into 20 ... Nxe5! 21 Bxe5 Qa3 22 b3 d4! 23 Nb5 dxe3 24 Nxa3 Bxe5 25 Rd3 Bf4 and Black is winning) 18 ... b4 19 axb4 Rxb4 20 Bf5 Qa1+ 21 Nb1 Nc5 22 Bxc5 Bxf5 23 gxf5 Rxc5 and it was soon over for White following 24 Kd2 Rxc2+ 25 Kxc2 Qxb2+ 26 Kd3 Rb3+ 27 Nc3 Rxc3+ 28 Kd4 Qb4+ 29 Kxd5 Qc4 mate!, F.Noetzel-A.Wisskirchen, Germany 2002.

16 ... Nh5

If Black is satisfied with a draw, then 16 ... b4 leads straight there after 17 gxf6 bxc3 18 Bxc3 Rxc3 19 fxg7 Rxb2 20 Rh8+ Kxg7 21 Qh6+ Kf6 22 Qh4+ Kg7 and a draw was agreed in T.Fogarasi-Z.Varga, Kecskemet 2010.

17 Bxg7 Nxg7 18 Bh3!?

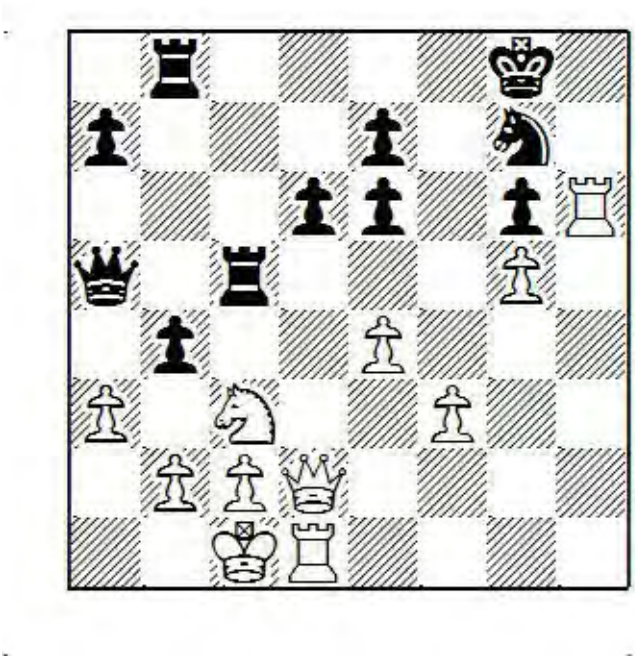
Here 18 f4 is simply too slow as after 18 ... b4 19 Nb1?! (19 Nd5 is better, but still not sufficient after 19 ... Bxd5 20 exd5 Rc5 21 Rh3 bxa3 22 Rxa3 Qb6 23 Ra2 a5 with an uncomfortable, uncoordinated White position), Black is primed for a combination.



Exercise: Black's queenside assault proceeding impressively. How does he engineer a breakthrough?

Answer: 19 ... Rxc2+! does the trick and now 20 Qxc2?! (or 20 Kxc2 Qc5+ 21 Nc3 bxc3 22 Qxc3 Bb3+ 23 Kc1 (23 Kd2 Qf2+ 24 Be2 Qxf4+ is even worse) 23 ... Qxc3+ 24 bxc3 Bxd1 25 Kxd1 Rb1+ 26 Ke2 Ra1 with a terrible endgame for White) 20 ... Rc8 21 Qxc8+ Bxc8 22 axb4 Qxb4 23 Nc3 Nh5 and even though White has two rooks for the queen (plus one pawn), the equation does not add up for him due to his weak pawns and exposed king, N.Mitkov-M.Khachiyan, Santa Monica 2005.

18 ... Rc5 19 Bxe6 fxe6 20 Rh6 b4



21 Rdh1?

The difficulty of navigating this position becomes evident here. White's text move throws his entire advantage away, while 21 Qh2 keeps it. For instance, after 21 ... bxa3 (21 ... bxc3 22 Rh8+ Kf7 23 Rxb8 cxb2+ 24 Kxb2 Rb5+ 25 Rxb5 Qxb5+ 26 Ka1 Qxg5 27 Qf2 and White is an exchange up with minimal compensation for Black) 22 Rh8+ Kf7 23 Rxb8 axb2+ 24 Rxb2 Qxc3 25 Qf4+ Kg8 26 Rb8+ Rc8 27 Rxc8+ Qxc8 28 Qe3, while Black has a bit more compensation than after 21 ... bxc3, it is definitely not enough.

21 ... Nh5 22 Rxg6+??

An absolutely dreadful, but tempting blunder after which Black wins almost by force.

Instead White could have held the balance with 22 Na2 Kg7 (or 22 ... b3!? 23 Nc3 Rxc3 24 Qxc3 Qxg5+ 25 Qd2 Qxd2+ 26 Kxd2 Kg7 27 R1xh5 gxh5 28 Rxh5 bxc2 29 Kxc2 e5 with a level rook ending) 23 f4 bxa3 (again 23 ... b3 is possible and after 24 Nc3 Rbc8 25 Rh3 Qa6 26 Qd4+ e5 27 Qd1 exf4 28 Rxg6+ Kxg6 29 Qxh5+ Kg7, White has nothing more than perpetual check) 24 b4 Qb5 25 Qd4+ e5 26 Qd1 Rbc8 27 Rh2 exf4 28 Rxg6+ Kf7 29 Rh6 (29 Qxh5 Rxc2+ 30 Rxc2 Qf1+ 31 Qd1 Qxd1+ 32 Kxd1 Rxc2 33 Kxc2 Kxg6 and Black wins) 29 ... Ng7 30 g6+ Ke8 and White has nothing better than taking the c5-rook, leading to a draw as the black queen can deliver perpetual check.

22 ... Kf7 23 Rh6 bxc3 24 Qh2 Rxg5

Of course, 24 ... cxb2+ 25 Kb1 Rxg5 also wins.

25 Qh3 Nf6 26 f4 Rxb2 0-1

With the king facing inevitable extermination from the black heavy pieces, White had to resign.

Game 43
R.Ponomariov-T.Radjabov
Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 g4 Be6

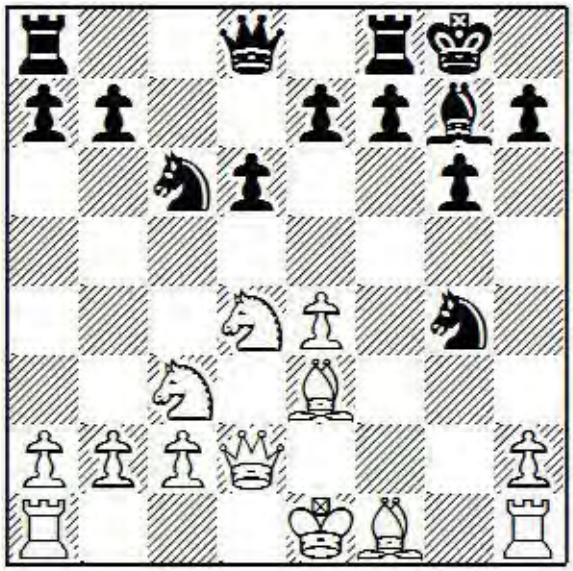
As we will discuss in other games in this chapter, this move, 9 ... Be6, is the correct move order to reach our main lines. Let's have a look at other possibilities (apart from 9 ... Nxd4):

a) 9 ... d5? is one of those cases where you should not try to break in the centre, even if the counterpart is attacking prematurely on the flank and after 10 g5 Nh5 11 exd5, Black is just a pawn down without sufficient compensation.

b) 9 ... e5?! 10 Nxc6!? (White should not get tempted to play 10 Ndb5?, because after 10 ... a6! 11 Nxd6 Nd4! 12 Bxd4 exd4 13 Nxc8, D.Savereide-M.Chiburdanidze, La Valetta 1980, now 13 ... dxc3! 14 Qxd8 Rxd8 15 Nb6 cxb2 16 Rb1 Rab8 leaves Black with the clearly better chances whereas 10 Nb3 is also a perfectly good move) 10 ... bxc6 11 g5 Nh5 12 0-0-0 Nf4 13 h4 d5 14 exd5 cxd5 15 Nxd5 Bb7 16 Bc4 Rc8 17 Bb3 Nxd5 18 Bxd5 Bxd5 19 Qxd5 Qc7 20 Qe4 and Black clearly does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn, Wang Hao-A.Salem, Abu Dhabi 2014.

c) 9 ... Bd7 is being played from time to time, but will usually just transpose into the lines we covered in Game 39 (Zugic-Nakamura) in the previous chapter as we had indicated then.

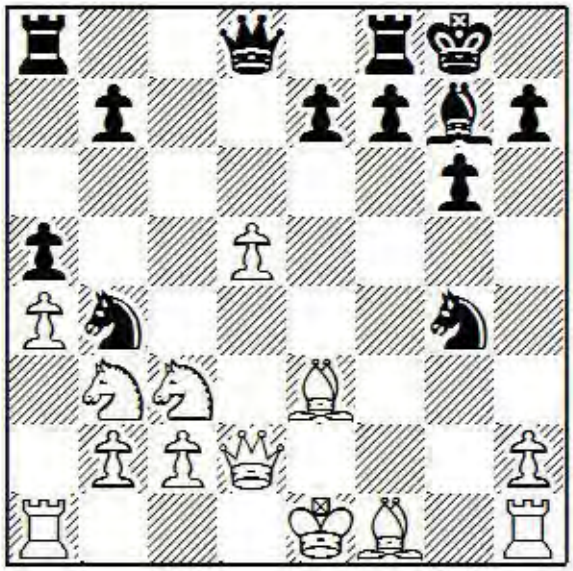
d) A much more fun, but nevertheless dubious choice is 9 ... Bxg4?!, an invention of Eduard Gufeld, who first wheeled it out in 1958. It then was more or less forgotten until a group of Hungarian players started using it with some effect. Once Tolnai used it to beat Psakhis (as we will see below), it quickly got analysed thoroughly and was refuted. But it is still seen on occasion, even played by strong players who definitely should know better. After 10 fxg4 Nxg4, we are at a critical junction:



d1) 11 Bg1 looks logical, keeping the dark-squared bishop, but it still leaves White with issues on the dark squares, because the bishop is not that well-placed on g1. After 11 ... e6, 12 h4 (12 Nf3 Rc8 13 h4 has also been tested at top level, but 13 ... h5 seems to promise Black a decent game) 12 ... h5 13 Nxc6 (13 Be2 Bh6 14 Qd3 Nce5 15 Qg3 Rc8 16 Rd1 a6 leaves Black with more or less adequate compensation for the piece, S.Mamedyarov-I.Cheparinov, Wijk aan Zee 2005, and 13 Nf3 Bh6 14 Qd3 Qf6 looks playable for Black) 13 ... bxc6 14 Be2 Bh6 (14 ... Qb8 intending ... d6-d5 can also be considered) 15 Qd3 Ne5 16 Qg3 Rb8 17 b3 Qa5 18 Rd1 Bg7 19 Rxd6?! (White picks up a pawn, but at the same time opens another file for Black so the former does better with 19 Rh3 after which Black has some, though insufficient compensation for the piece) 19 ... Rbd8 20 Rxd8 Rxd8 21 Kf1 Rd2 22 Rh3 Ng4 23 Qb8+ Kh7 24 b4? (now White's position crumbles rapidly) 24 ... Qa3 25 Qxa7 Qc1+ 26 Kg2 Bxc3 27 Rxc3 Rxe2+ 28 Kg3 Qe1+ 29 Kf3 Qf1+ 30 Kg3 and facing mate, White resigned in L.Psakhis-T.Tolnai, Dortmund 1989.

d2) 11 Nb3 has been established as White's best move. Now Black has a few moves to choose from:

d21) 11 ... a5?! 12 a4 d5 13 exd5 (13 0-0-0? is bad due to 13 ... d4! or 13 Nxd5 e6 14 Bg5 f6 15 Ne3 fxg5 16 Nxg4 Rf4, and Black is decidedly doing fine) 13 ... Nb4 (a possibly better option is 13 ... Nxe3 14 Qxe3 Bxc3+ 15 bxc3 Qxd5 16 Rg1 Rad8, and Black is still in the game, although I doubt he has sufficient compensation for the piece), and now:



d211) 14 Bg5! is undoubtedly White's strongest move. After 14 ... h6 (or 14 ... Bxc3 15 bxc3 Nxc2+ 16 Qxc2 Qxd5, and here White has the strong 17 h3! that holds everything together and leaves White with a significant advantage) 15 Be2 hxg5 16 Bxg4 f5 17 Bf3 g4 18 Bg2 Rc8 19 0-0 (Mikhalchishin), and Black's initiative is soon running out of steam.

d212) 14 0-0-0 Rc8 15 Kb1?! Bxc3 16 bxc3 Nxe3 17 Qxe3 Nxd5 is given by Mikhalchishin, and here Black is doing very well.

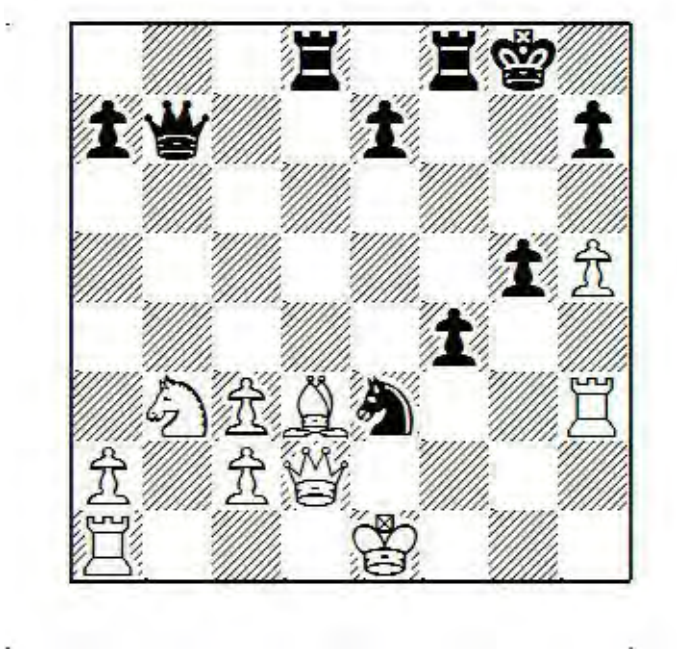
d213) 14 Bf4?! e5! 15 Bg5 (Here 15 dxe6 Qh4+! 16 Bg3 Qf6! is risky for White) 15 ... Bf6? (15 ... Nxc2+! works well for Black, e.g. 16 Kd1 Bf6 17 Bxf6?! Nge3+) 16 Bxf6 (Mikhalchishin's suggestion of 16 h4!? h6 17 Rg1 also looks very strong for White) 16 ... Qxf6 17 0-0-0! Nf2 18 Bb5 Nxh1 19 Rxh1, and White is well on the road to winning, Z.Efimenko-R.Forster, Porto Carras 2011.

d22) Insufficient is 11 ... Nxe3 12 Qxe3 e6 13 0-0-0 a5 14 a4 Rc8 15 Kb1 Ne5 16 Be2, and Black clearly does not have enough for the piece, D.Solak-M.Roganovic, Vrnjacka Banja 2010.

d23) 11 ... d5 12 exd5 (12 0-0-0? d4!) and we have:

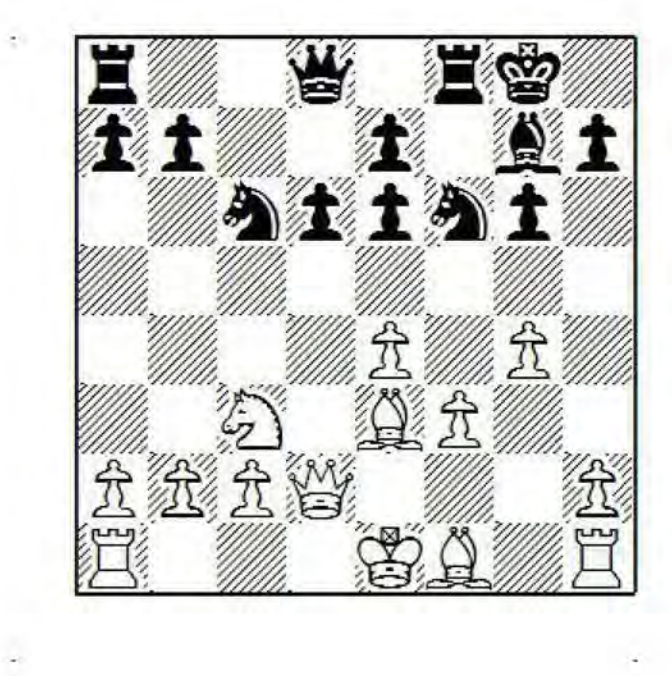
d231)12 ... Nxe3 13 Qxe3 Bxc3+ 14 bxc3 Qxd5 15 Rg1 Rad8 gives White some compensation for the piece, although White should have the better chances after 16 Bd3.

d232) 12 ... Bxc3 13 bxc3 (13 Qxc3 Qxd5 offers unclear chances) 13 ... Nxe3 14 dxc6?! (14 Qxe3!? transposing to the 12 ... Nxe3 line above, may possibly be White's better choice as Black now obtains excellent play) 14 ... Qb6 15 cxb7 Rad8 16 Bd3 (16 b8Q Rxb8 17 Nd4 (17 Bd3 keeps White on an even keel) 17 ... Nxf1 (17 ... e5! leaves Black clearly better) 18 Rxf1 Rbd8 (Mikhalchishin) leaves Black with only one pawn (at least for the moment) for the piece though with very decent compensation) 16 ... f5 17 h4 Qxb7 18 Rh3 f4 19 h5 g5 is claimed by my computer to be marginally better for White.



I know I would rather play Black than White in this position. The bottom line is, while the 9 ... Bxg4 line is not refuted, White should still be better.

10 Nxe6 fxe6



Question: What are the pros and cons of allowing the doubling of the e-pawns?

Answer: Black has the d5-square under control. The half-open f-file, in line with ... Ne5, might put the f3-pawn under pressure too. In return, White gets the bishop pair and the black kingside is weakened further. The e6-pawn might be targeted after Bc4 and thus Black must deal with it carefully.

11 0-0-0

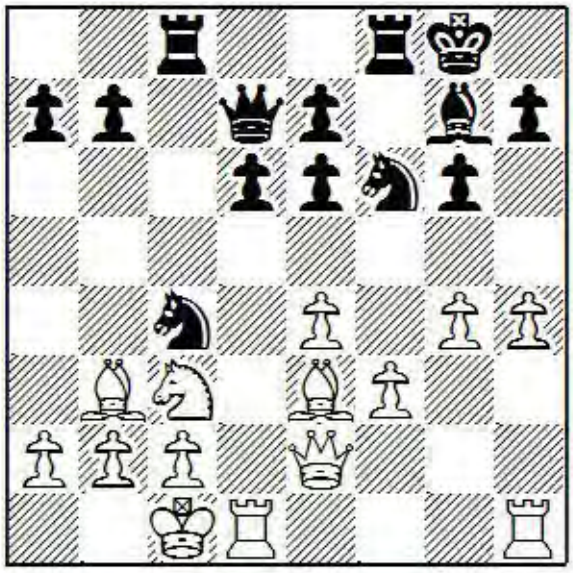
Note that 11 Bc4 is best met with 11 ... Qc8 12 Bb3 Na5 and Black really has no problems after 13 0-0-0 Nxb3+ 14 cxb3 (or 14 axb3 Qc6) 14 ... Nd7 15 Rhf1 Bxc3 16 bxc3 Ne5 17 Bf4 Qc5 18 Bxe5 Qxe5 19 f4 Qc5 20 Rf3 a5 21 Qd4 Rac8 and here the combatants agreed to a draw in Z.Varga-M.Golubev, Baile Tusnad 1997.

11 ... Ne5

In another relatively recent top encounter, Black instead tried 11 ... Rc8 and after 12 Bc4 Qd7 13 Bb3 (or 13 h4!? Ne5 14 Be2 and now 14 ... b5! offers Black excellent counterplay – Rogozenco) 13 ... Na5 14 h4, Black can take the game in two directions:

a) 14 ... Nxb3+!? 15 axb3 (or 15 cxb3 Qc6 16 Bd4 b5 17 Kb1 b4 18 Ne2 a5, and Black is not worse off) 15 ... Qc6 16 Bh6 (16 h5 Nd7 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 Qh2 Rxf3 19 Qh7+ Kf7 20 Bh6 Rg8 is messy, but looks fine for Black) 16 ... Bxh6 17 Qxh6 Qc5 and a draw was agreed, O.Lorentzen-M.Lilleoren, correspondence 2007, although after 18 Kb1 Qe5 19 Qd2 Nd7, the chances are a tad better for White.

b) 14 ... Nc4 and here Golubev's suggestion of 15 Qe2!? looks extremely strong:



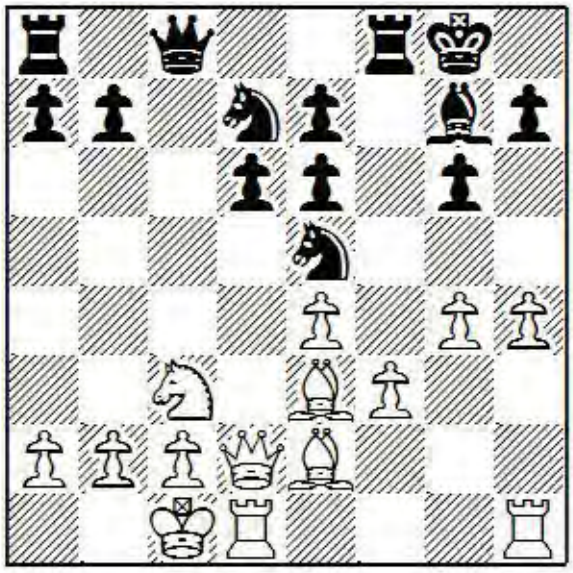
b1) Golubev's idea is 15 ... Nxb2 16 Kxb2 Rxc3 17 Bd4 Rcc8 18 h5 with a large advantage for White.

b2) Also insufficient is 15 ... Qc6 16 h5 gxh5 17 Bd4 Rf7 18 g5 Nd7 19 f4 Nf8 20 Qxh5 and White is calling the shots.

12 Be2 Rc8

An interesting alternative is 12 ... Qc8!? which exerts pressure on the c-file as well as indirectly protect the e6-pawn:

a) After 13 h4 Nfd7 (instead, 13 ... Nc4 14 Bxc4 Qxc4 15 h5 Nd7 16 hxg6 hxg6 17 Rh3 Ne5 18 f4 Nxg4 19 Qg2 Nxe3 20 Qxg6 Nxd1 was agreed drawn in K.Kulaots-O.Cvitan, Zadar 2011, but 17 f4!? as suggested by Stoica in *Chess Informant* seems give White better chances), we have an interesting crossroad for White.



Now White has to decide between two aggressive pawn thrusts:

a1) 14 h5 Nxf3 15 Nd5 Nxd2 (15 ... Qe8 16 Bxf3 exd5 17 Be2! Ne5 18 Qxd5+ Qf7 19 g5 Rad8 20 h6 Bh8 21 Rdf1 Qxd5 22 exd5 leaves White with a clear advantage, I.Chirila-V.Jianu, Baia Sprie 2012) 16 Nxe7+ Kf7 17 Nxc8 Raxc8 18 hxg6+ hxg6 19 Rxd2 Ke7 20 Bg5+ Bf6 21 Rh7+ Rf7 22 Bxf6+ Kxf6 23 g5+ (23 Rxf7+ Kxf7 24 Rxd6 Ne5 25 a4 Rh8 and the strong knight versus bad bishop theme provides

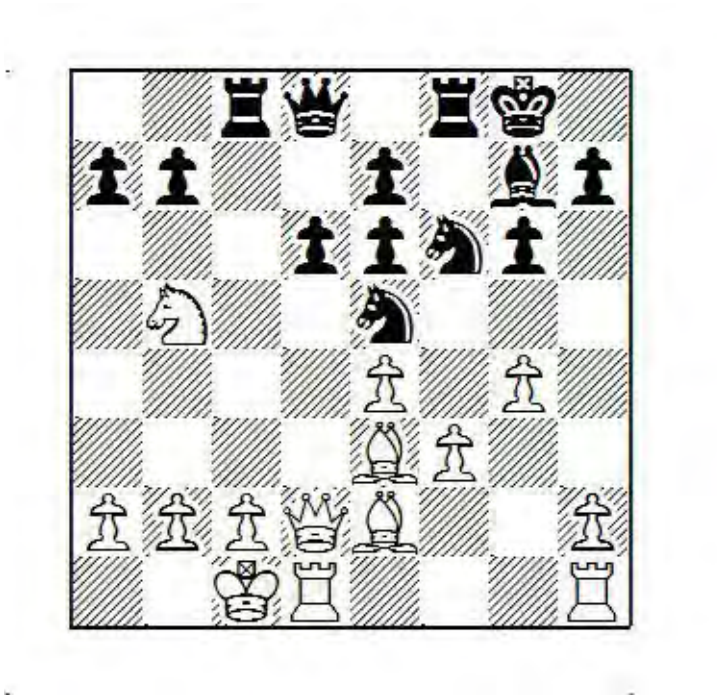
Black with adequate compensation for the pawn, R.Zelcic-O.Cvitan, Porec 2014) 23 ... Ke7 24 Rxf7+ Kxf7 25 Rxd6 Ne5 26 Kd2 Ke7 27 Rd4 Rc7, and once again we have a situation where Black has some compensation for pawn thanks to his stronger knight though his defensive task is quite unpleasant, R.Edouard-O.Cvitan, Switzerland 2013.

a2) 14 f4 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Qxc4 16 e5 and now 16 ... Rfd8 17 h5 dxe5 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 Qh2 exf4 20 Bxf4 Nf6, and despite his somewhat dubious looking kingside, Black is doing fine here, N.Guliyev-R.Mamedov, Baku 2012.

b) 13 Rhe1 Nc4 14 Bxc4 Qxc4 15 Bd4 e5 16 Be3 b5 17 b3 Qc6 18 g5 b4 19 Na4 Nd7 20 Rf1 a5 21 Qd5+ Qxd5 22 Rxd5 and White will have a long-term initiative thanks to his more active pieces, M.Bartel-M.Sebenik, Biel 2014.

c) 13 Kb1 Nfd7 14 Rhf1 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Qxc4 16 Ne2 Ne5 17 b3 Qc8 18 Nd4 Nc6 19 f4 e5 20 Nxc6 Qxc6 21 Qd5+ Qxd5 22 exd5 Bh6 23 g5 Bg7 is about equal, Z.Hracek-G.Jones, Porto Carras 2011.

13 Nb5



Question: What is the point behind this move? Surely White's plan isn't to grab the a-pawn?

Answer: The main idea behind this move is to send the knight on its way to the d4-square to put pressure on the e6-pawn.

13 ... a6

In fact, Black has tried the a-pawn sacrifice with 13 ... Qd7 14 Nxa7 (14 Nd4 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 Kb1 Rfc8 17 c3 b5 18 Rc1 a5 19 h4 was tested in F.Vallejo Pons-P.Carlsson, Caleta 2010 and now the dynamic 19 ... Qb7 is probably best) 14 ... Ra8 15 Kb1 was tested in F.Vallejo Pons-S.Azarov, Dresden 2008, and now Schulze in *Chessbase Magazine* offers 15 ... b6 16 Nb5 (16 Bxb6? gets punished in proper Dragon fashion after 16 ... Rfb8 17 Bd4 Rxa7 18 Bxa7 Qxa7 19 c3 Nexg4 20 fxg4 Nxe4 21 Qc1 Nxc3+ 22 Ka1 Qxa2 mate) 16 ... Nxf3 17 Bxf3 Qxb5 18 e5 Nd5 (18 ... Nxg4 19 Bxg4 Qc4 20 a3 Qxg4 21 exd6 exd6 22 Qxd6 Qc4 23 Rhe1 is marginally better for White) 19 Bxd5 exd5 20 Qxd5+ Qxd5 21 Rxd5 Bxe5 with an interesting ending that is difficult to evaluate.

14 Nd4 Qd7 15 Kb1 d5

This break in the centre makes a great deal of sense. The alternatives are less promising:

a) 15 ... Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 h4 e5 (White's attack is too swift after 17 ... Rfc8 18 Rc1 b5 19 h5 e5 20 Nb3 Qc7 21 hxg6 hxg6 22 Bh6 e6 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Qh6+ Kf7 25 g5 Ne8 26 Qh7+ Ng7 27 Rh6 Rxc2 28 Qxg6+ Kg8 29 Qh7+ and a draw was agreed in M.Stojanovic-A.Kovacevic, Tivat 2011 though it is pretty clear that Black loses after 29 ... Kf7 30 Rf6+ with mate to follow soon) 18 Ne2 Qe6 19 h5 Rf7 20 Ng3 Kf8 21 b3 Rc6 22 c4 Ke8 23 Rc1 Nd7 24 Rhf1 and while Black's position is solid, it is also quite

passive and without much counterplay, A.Fedorov-E.Kanter, St Petersburg 2010.

b) 15 ... b5 16 h4 Nc4 17 Bxc4 bxc4 18 c3 e5 19 Nc2 Qb7 20 Ka1 gives White a steady plus and his kingside attack can easily get pretty scary for Black.

16 g5 Nh5 17 f4 Nc4 18 Bxc4 dxc4

The other recapture 18 ... Rxc4 is met by 19 e5 and Black's g7-bishop will be dead for a long time to come.

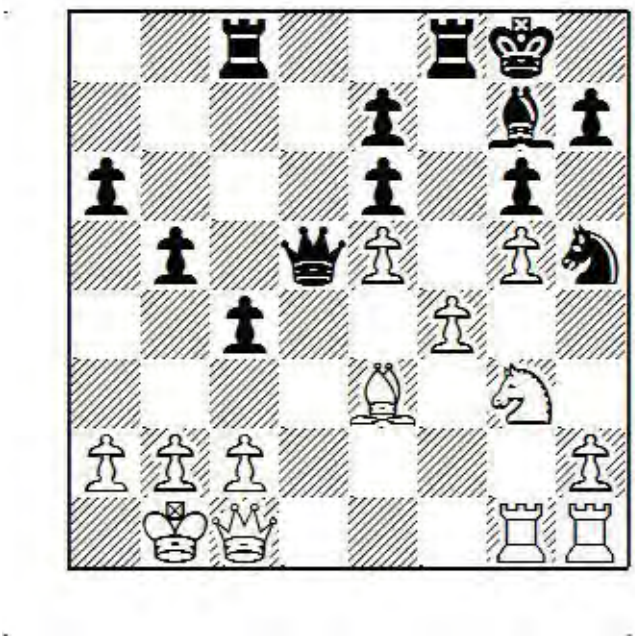
19 e5

White wants to make certain that Black is not allowed to play ... e6-e5, freeing the dark-squared bishop. Also 19 Qb4!? is worth considering.

19 ... Qd5 20 Ne2

Once again, 20 Qb4!? Rcd8 21 Rhf1 looks good for White.

20 ... Qg2 21 Rdg1 Qd5 22 Qc1 b5 23 Ng3



It makes good sense to question Black's intentions regarding the knight. White could also insert 23 Rd1 Qc6 first before 24 Ng3. In either case, White should be clearly better.

23 ... b4?!

The logical continuation, but my computer is not keen on it, instead offering two ugly alternatives:

a) 23 ... Nxg3 24 hxg3 and it looks like the 'tall pawn' on g7 will never be allowed to return to the game. Moreover, things will get really ugly on the h-file soon.

b) 23 ... Qf3 24 Nxh5 Qxh5 is certainly playable, but the queen really should not be stuck on the h5-square.

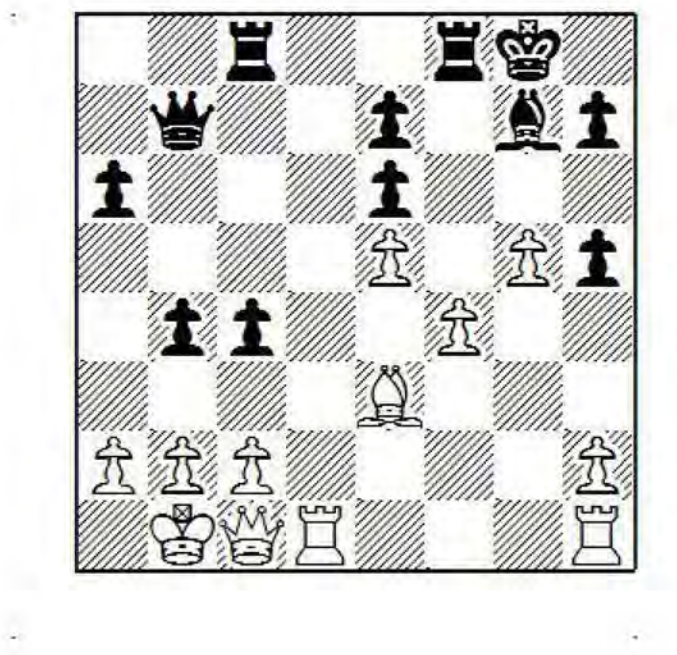
24 Rd1

The obvious 24 Nxh5 gxh5 25 Rd1 Qb5 26 Rd4 begs to be looked at. One continuation could be 26 ... b3 27 c3 bxa2+ 28 Kxa2 and White should be better.

24 ... Qb7

Possibly better is 24 ... Qa5 25 Ne4 Qb5 26 Rhf1 Qc6.

25 Nxh5 gxh5



Question: Black must be lost here, right? The bad bishop and the two doubled pawns on the e- and h-files look dreadful.

Answer: Stating that the game is lost here is perhaps a bit drastic, but it does look quite ugly. Nevertheless, if Black can make it to the endgame, the king can easily get active via f7-g6-f5 and the bishop might be un-caged with ... h7-h6. So the bottom line is: White is better, but definitely not winning.

26 Qd2?!

This only helps Black get his pieces more active. A good alternative is 26 Rd4 Rfd8 27 Rhd1 Rd5 28 Qd2 Rxd4 29 Qxd4 and White is decidedly in control of the game.

26 ... Rcd8 27 Qe2

Retreating the queen is possibly better, although it would admit that the previous move was a mistake. After 27 Qc1 b3 28 Ka1 Qe4!? (or 28 ... bxa2 29 Bd2 Qf3 30 Rdf1 Qg2 31 Bc3 Rf5 32 Qe3 and only White can be better) 29 axb3 cxb3 30 cxb3 Rc8 31 Qd2 Rfd8 32 Qxd8+ Rxd8 33 Rxd8+ Kf7 34 Re1 Qc2 35 Rd2 Qxb3, White should have the better chances on account of the two rooks vs. queen as well as Black's dreadful bishop, but it is certainly is not going to be easy to convert.

27 ... Qe4!

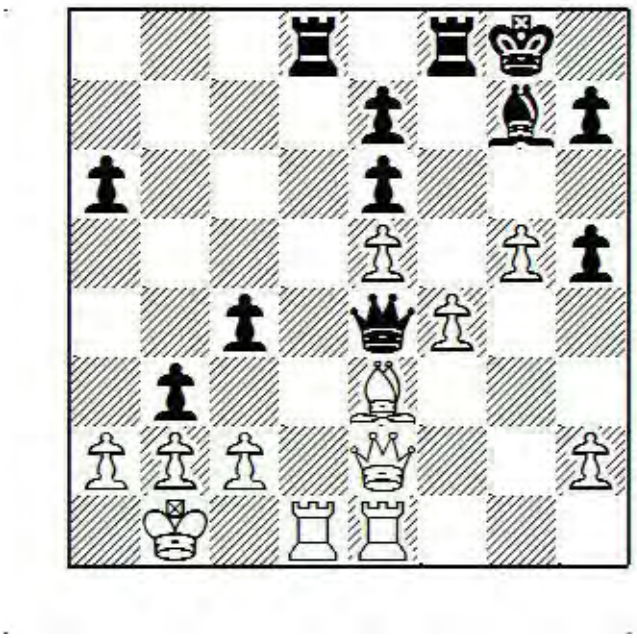
Activity is required if Black is to stay in the game.

28 Rhe1

After 28 Rde1, things can get messy real fast with 28 ... a5 29 Rhg1 Rd5 30 Qxh5 b3 31 Qe2 bxa2+ 32 Ka1 c3 33 bxc3 Rb8. The computer claims an advantage for White but this is not an easy position to play for either side.

28 ... b3!?

Although the Dragon bishop is temporarily entombed, Black is maximising activity and forcing White to make concrete decisions.

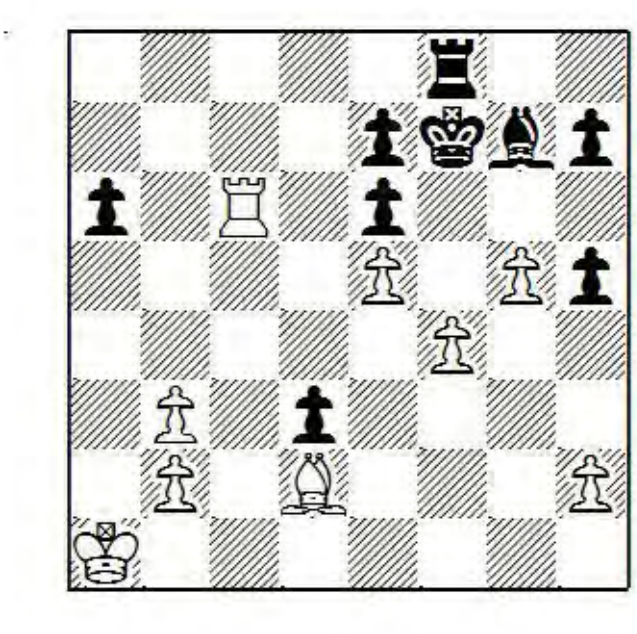


29 Rd2?!

Now Black returns to the game for real. The more solid 29 Rc1!? is actually better, but not by a lot if Black plays accurately with 29 ... bxa2+ 30 Kxa2 Rd5 31 Bd2 Qxe2 32 Rxe2 c3! 33 bxc3 Rfd8 34 Rd1 Kf7 and we are talking about margins when discussing White's plus.

29 ... Rd5 30 Ka1 Rfd8!?

The more active move. However, 30 ... Rxd2 is preferred by the computer and after 31 Bxd2 Qxc2 32 Rc1 Qd3 33 Qxd3 cxd3 34 axb3 Kf7 35 Rc6, I can understand why Radjabov would not want to play this.



The g7-bishop will eventually come out of its cage with the ... h7-h6 break but the ending is still very difficult.

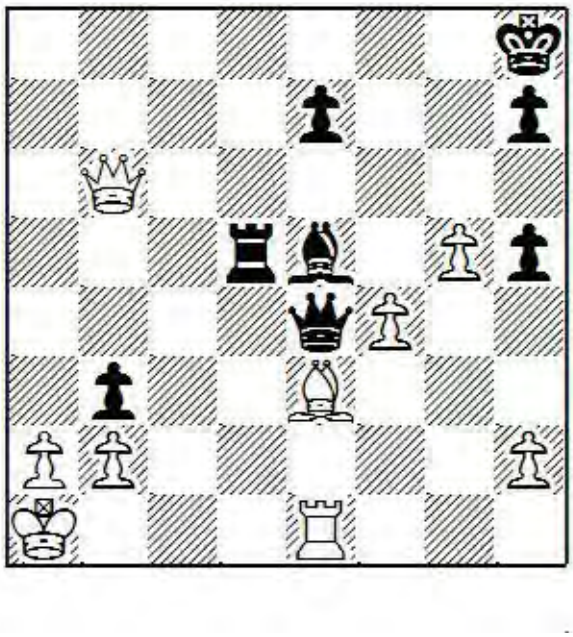
Question: Why would the bishop escape after ... h7-h6? Surely White can keep it entombed with h2-h4?

Answer: White cannot afford to let Black's h-pawn run loose. For example, after 35 ... h6 36 h4?? (36 g6+ is the way to go) 36 ... hxg5 37 hxg5 h4!, White has to retreat his rook to cover the passer and Black can press on with ... Rh8 and an invasion of the king down the light squares via ... Kg6-f5-g4 to aid the pawn. Black is winning then, even with one bishop hemmed in.

31 Rxd5 Qxd5

Perhaps 31 ... Rxd5!? is an improvement as after 32 cxb3 cxb3 33 Qxa6 Bxe5 (not 33 ... Qxe3??

because of 34 Qxe6+ Kf8 35 Qf5+ and the queen can assist with the back rank defence, leaving Black's queen en prise) 34 Qxe6+ Kh8 35 Qb6, Black has a desperado defence.



Now the black pieces are shedded with 35 ... Bxb2+! 36 Kxb2 Rd2+!! 37 Bxd2 Qc2+ 38 Ka3 Qxa2+ 39 Kb4 Qxd2+ 40 Kxb3 Qxe1 and a draw seems likely.

32 cxb3 cxb3 33 Rc1

My computer recommended 33 a3 but one can comprehend that White is not compelled to play such a move with perpetual back rank issues and weak light squares.

33 ... h4

Black can also opt for 33 ... Qd3 34 Qf2 (34 Qxd3 Rxd3 35 Re1 a5 36 axb3 Rxb3 37 Ka2 a4 should not be any worse for Black) 34 ... bxa2 35 Kxa2 Qe4 and we have an improved version (for Black) of the line White should be aiming for on the next move.

34 Qc4

Possibly stronger is 34 Qg4 bxa2 35 Qxh4 Qe4 36 Qf2 and White has a small advantage due to his extra pawn and Black's ugly bishop. However, Black's active queen and rook do provide some measure of counterplay.

34 ... bxa2

As Vigorito noted, Black can also consider 34 ... Qxc4 35 Rxc4 Rd1+ 36 Rc1 Rxc1+ 37 Bxc1 Kf7! and the black king is very close to the white pawns, but I doubt it leads to anything significant.

35 Qxd5 Rxd5

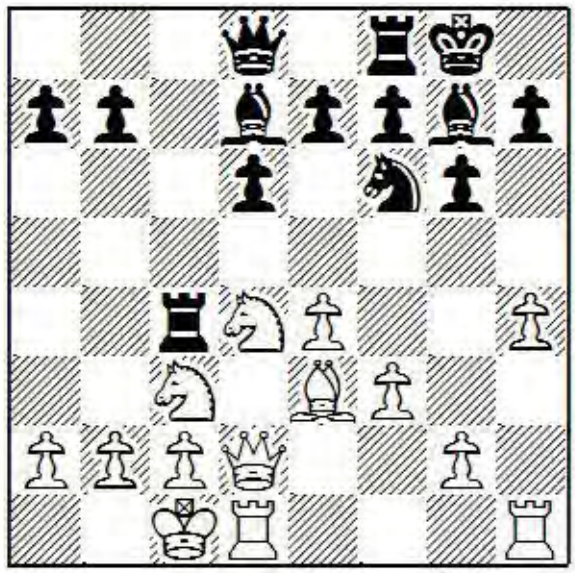
It could be tempting to play 35 ... exd5 to follow it up with ... e7-e6, freeing the bishop. But after 36 Kxa2, Black's position is rather passive and White's rook is vastly superior to its black counterpart.

36 h3 Kf7 37 Kxa2 h6 38 Rg1 ½-½

If anything Black is now better, though not significantly so. Nevertheless the g7-bishop finally seems like it is about to be brought out of its prison. One line can run 38 ... hxg5 39 Rxg5 Rd3 40 Bf2 Rf3 41 Bxh4 Rxf4 42 Be1 Rf5 43 Rg3 Bxe5 44 Ra3 Bd6 45 Rxa6 Rf1 46 Bc3 Rh1 and probably neither side can win this though Black can still play on.

Chapter Nine
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: Main Line – 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 h4 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 h4 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4

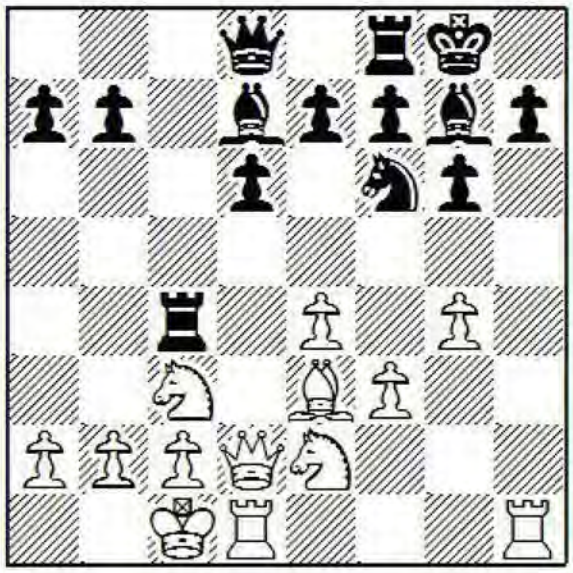


There are many sharp and fascinating variations in the Sicilian Dragon, you have already encountered several in the previous chapters. However, the lines that are being covered in this chapter are some of the most entertaining, headscratchingly complicated, walking on a razor's edge kind of lines you will find in the entire Dragon Variation complex. That being said, the main lines, the ones where White immediately sacrifices a pawn with 14 h5 have never been very popular in regular over-board-games at top level. One of the reasons for this is that there are incredibly many forced lines that end up in a draw or in very drawish positions. Strong GMs usually stay clear of those lines as White, but from time to time, they venture into the jungle to demonstrate a discovery. Similarly on the Black side, it has been quite a while since a grandmaster has employed this variation on a regular basis, in part because, there are countless ways to step wrong and get punished instantly. Despite all of this, it is a fun line to play with either side, but mostly Black, if you can keep track of all the variations. It has been quite some time since these lines were discussed in depth in any significant fashion, so much of the analysis that exists is ripe for an overhaul with the assistance of a heavy-powered chess engine. What you will find in this chapter will only scratch the surface of the entire picture, but hopefully you will get the taste for trying out.

In Game 44, White tries out a line that Karpov popularised – 14 h5 Nxh5 15 g4 Nf6 16 Nde2, but this line has already expired as a critical choice for White. Far more interesting is 16 Nb3 which is the subject of Game 45, along with some interesting lesser alternatives in the notes. In Game 46, White tests 16 Bh6, which is one of the crucial variations to understand and play well in this line.

Game 44
A.Bragin-V.Malinin
Correspondence 2004

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 h4 Ne5 11 Bb3 Rc8 12 0-0-0 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 h5 Nxh5 15 g4 Nf6 16 Nde2



This move came to prominence when Anatoly Karpov used it with success in the Candidates Final in 1974 against Viktor Korchnoi. As a direct result of White's convincing victory in this game, the line saw a lot of action throughout the 1970s, but as eventually emerged that Black is doing fine, the popularity inevitably varied.

Question: What is the point of the knight retreat?

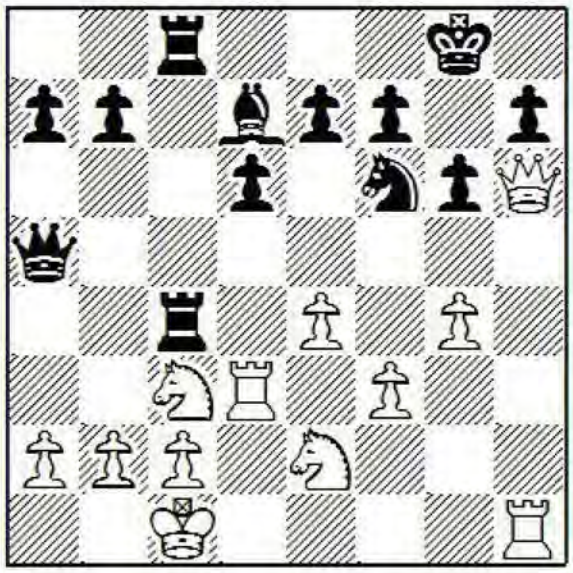
Answer: The knight retreat gives extra support to the Nc3 to prevent possible ... Rxc3 sacrifices and also to free up the e3-bishop to head for the h6-square.

16 ... Re8!

Question: What is the idea behind this move?

Answer: It seems that this odd-looking rook move that apparently does little other than to protect the e7-pawn one more time. For starters, it is a useful waiting move that can be used while Black waits for White to commit himself. This is an idea you will see again and again in this section of the book. Furthermore, protecting the e7-pawn can be very important, particularly when Black develops his queen to a5 and has to deal with Nd5. Then there is also the issue of the dark-squared bishops. If White plays Bh6 at some point, then Black can choose to retreat the bishop to h8 without sacrificing the exchange.

On the other hand, Korchnoi's move 16 ... Qa5?! is considered less accurate although in practical terms, it is strictly speaking playable. After 17 Bh6 Bxh6 (17 ... Bh8?! 18 Bxf8 Kxf8 has been tested a couple of times, but 19 Qe3! as in Y.Kruppa-M.Golubev, Kharkov 1984, has spoilt the fun for Black. The immediate threat is 20 e5, and after 19 ... Bc6 20 Kb1, it is hard to claim that Black has full compensation for the exchange) 18 Qxh6 Rfc8, Karpov's big move against Korchnoi was 19 Rd3!, shoring up on the defence of the c3-knight.



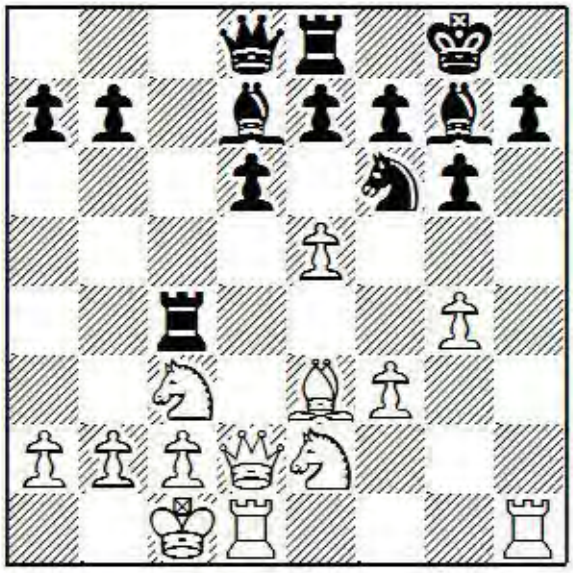
19 ... Be6! (this somewhat holds the balance for Black, whereas Korchnoi's 19 ... R4c5? was resolutely countered with 20 g5! Rxg5 21 Rd5! and now 21 ... Rxd5 22 Nxd5 Re8 23 Nef4 Bc6 24 e5! Bxd5 25 exf6 exf6 26 Qxh7+ Kf8 27 Qh8+ forcing resignation was the conclusion of the Karpov-Korchnoi game) 20 g5 Nh5 21 Ng3 Qe5 22 Nxh5 (22 Rxh5!? is an interesting but not particularly threatening alternative after 22 ... gxh5 23 Nxh5 Rxc3 24 bxc3 Rxc3 25 f4 Rxc2+ 26 Kxc2 Qc5+ and a draw was agreed because White's king cannot escape the checks, A.Bangiev-G.Nesis, correspondence 1974) 22 ... gxh5 23 Qxh5 and now there are two significant Black moves:

a) 23 ... Kf8 is given an '!' by Gufeld/Stetsko but is hardly the recipe for Black as after 24 Qh2 (or 24 Qxh7!? Qxg5+ 25 Kb1 Ke8 26 Qh2!?, only White can be better) 24 ... Qxg5+ 25 f4 Qf6 26 f5 Rxc3 27 bxc3 Bxa2 28 Qxh7 Ke8 in Nagornov-G.Nesis, correspondence 1976, which is considered equal by Gufeld/Stetsko, White just looks better after 29 Qh8+ Kd7 30 Qxf6 exf6 31 Kb2 Bc4 32 Rd4.

b) 23 ... Qg7 24 f4 d5 25 Rhd1!? Qg6 (or 25 ... Qf8!? 26 exd5 Bf5 27 Re3 b5 with some compensation for the pawn in the form pressure against White's king) 26 Qh6 Bg4 27 R1d2 Qxh6 28 gxh6 f5 29 Rxd5 Kf7 and although Black is a pawn down, his active pieces gives him excellent chances of saving the draw, V.Skotorenko-A.Geller, correspondence 1980.

17 e5!?

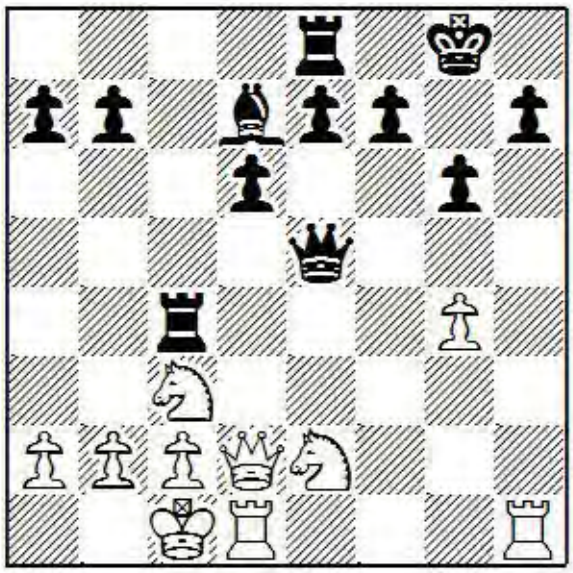
White attempts to take advantage of Black's clumsy-looking piece set-up tactically. The idea is that if Black now plays 17 ... dxe5, then 18 g5 wins a piece because the f6-knight has to protect the d7-bishop. This tactical theme is very common in this particular variation of the Dragon Sicilian.



White has a couple of options available here:

a) 17 Bd4 is quite harmless if met correctly by 17 ... Qa5 18 Kb1 (or 18 g5 Nh5 19 Bxg7, and now the untried 19 ... Nxg7!? 20 Nf4 Rxc3! 21 Qxc3 Qxg5 22 Qd2 h5 should be fine for Black) 18 ... Rec8 (Black's best try might be 18 ... Be6!? 19 Rh2 b5 20 Qg5 (given a '!' by Gufeld) 20 ... Rcc8! 21 Qxb5 21 ... Bxa2+ 22 Kc1 Qxb5 23 Nxb5 a6 24 Nbc3 Be6 with a pleasant game for Black) 19 g5 Nh5 20 Bxg7?! (20 Nd5!? looks like an improvement and after 20 ... Qxd2 21 Rxd2 Re8 22 Bxa7, White's position appears slightly preferable) 20 ... Kxg7 21 Nf4 Be6 (Black should try 21 ... Rxc3! 22 Nxh5+ gxh5 23 bxc3 Rxc3 24 Qd4+ Kg8 25 Rd3 Qb5+ with the better chances) 22 Nxh5+ gxh5 23 Rxh5 Rxc3 24 Qd4+ Kg8 25 bxc3 Rc4 26 Qf2 Qa3 27 Rd3 Rb4+ 28 cxb4 Bxa2+ and a draw was agreed in B.Kreiman-R.Olthof, Philadelphia 1990.

b) 17 Bh6 Bh8 (the idea behind Black's ... Re8) 18 e5 forces the win of a piece for three pawns, another common theme in this line of the Dragon complex. 18 ... Nxg4 19 fxg4 Bxe5 20 Bf4 Qa5 21 Bxe5 Qxe5 is an interesting line.



Theoretically speaking, White is doing fine in this position, but in practical terms things are more complicated. In particular, Gennady Nesis, the Russian correspondence chess grandmaster, has enjoyed

excellent results from this position as Black.

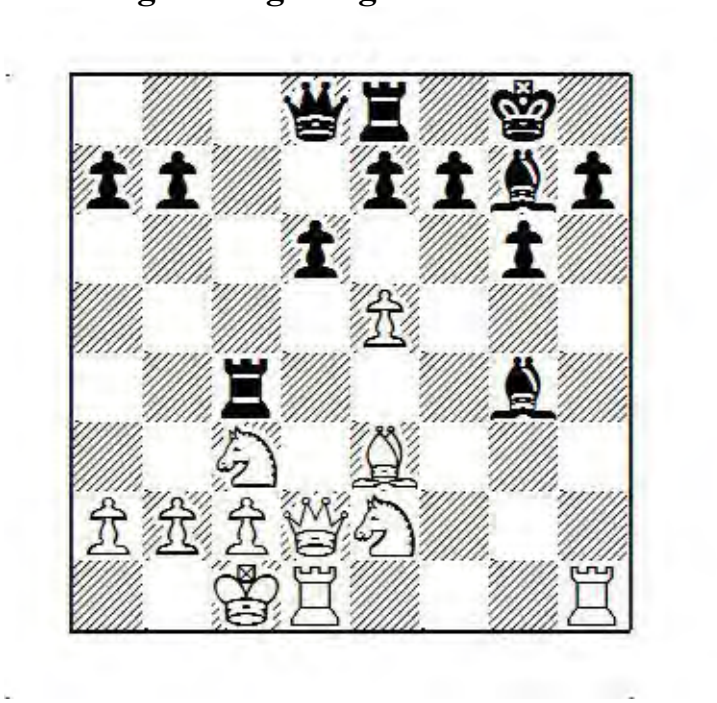
White has attempted:

a) 22 g5 b5 23 Nd4 b4 24 Nce2 Rec8 25 Kb1 Bg4 26 Rc1 Bxe2 27 Nxe2 R8c5 28 Rhg1 Rd5, and Black is obviously enjoying the better chances thanks to superior active pieces, C.Sanchez Pouso-G.Nesis, correspondence 1980.

b) 22 Qh6!? Qg7 23 Qe3!? Rxg4 24 Qxa7 Bc6 is given as better for White by *Houdini*, but in E.Prandstetter-L.Dobrovolsky, Smokovec 1982, chances proved to be fairly even.

c) 22 Nd5 Rxg4 23 Nec3 Qg5 24 Rde1 (24 Nc7 Qxd2+ 25 Rxd2 Rc8 26 N7d5 Re8 27 Nc7 and now Black can either accept the repetition of moves or boldly proceed with 27 ... Bc6! 28 Re1 Rc8 29 N7d5 Kf8 30 Nxe7 Re8 31 Rde2 h5 with better chances for Black, thanks to his kingside pawns) 24 ... h5 25 Qxg5 Rxg5 26 Nxe7+ Kg7 and Black was clearly better in the endgame, M.Lecroq-G.Nesis, correspondence 1977.

17 ... Nxg4 18 fxg4 Bxg4



Question: I know Black received three pawns on return for the knight, but if I do not like to sacrifice my pieces, are there any alternatives?

Answer: If you do not like this type of position, then this variation is an absolutely no-go for you. This kind of sacrifice happens routinely in all the sub-variations of this line, so you better get comfortable with it.

19 Rdg1

A look at the options:

a) At first glance, 19 e6!? doesn't look logical at all. Why hand over a pawn without getting anything in return? The point is, it allows White to mess with Black's piece coordination and get an attack going. Following 19 ... Bxe6 20 Bd4 f6 21 Nf4 Bf7 22 Qh2?! (instead of this direct threat against h7, 22 Nfd5!? may actually be better and after 22 ... Qa5 23 Qg2 e5 (after 23 ... Bxd5 24 Nxd5 Qxa2 25 Rd3 Qa1+ 26 Kd2, it is difficult for Black to get his pieces coordinated properly) 24 Be3 f5 25 Bh6 Bh8 26 a3 with a complicated position where White should not be worse) 22 ... Rxd4? (better is 22 ... h5!? 23 Be3 Qa5 24 Rdg1 Rxc3! 25 bxc3 Qxc3 and the five pawns and White's weakened king position constitute more than adequate compensation for the rook) 23 Qxh7+ Kf8 24 Rxd4 e5 25 Nh5 gxh5 26 Rg1 exd4 27 Qxg7+ Ke7 28 Nd5+ Ke6 29 Re1+, the end is near for Black, R.Slobodjan-T.Heuer, Germany League 1996.

b) So what happens on 19 exd6? Well, for starters this is most likely one of White's weaker moves, since 19 ... Qxd6 leaves White with all sorts of issues due to Black's very active pieces and an exchange of the queens on d6 will only open the e-file for Black's e8-rook, causing even more mayhem. Therefore 20 Rde1 Qxd2+ 21 Bxd2 Rd8 22 Be3 b6 is probably the best, leaving Black comfortably better as the

kingside pawns will soon start rolling forward.

19 ... Qa5

Black chooses the 'normal' square for the queen, but 19 ... Qd7 to overprotect the bishop makes a lot of sense.

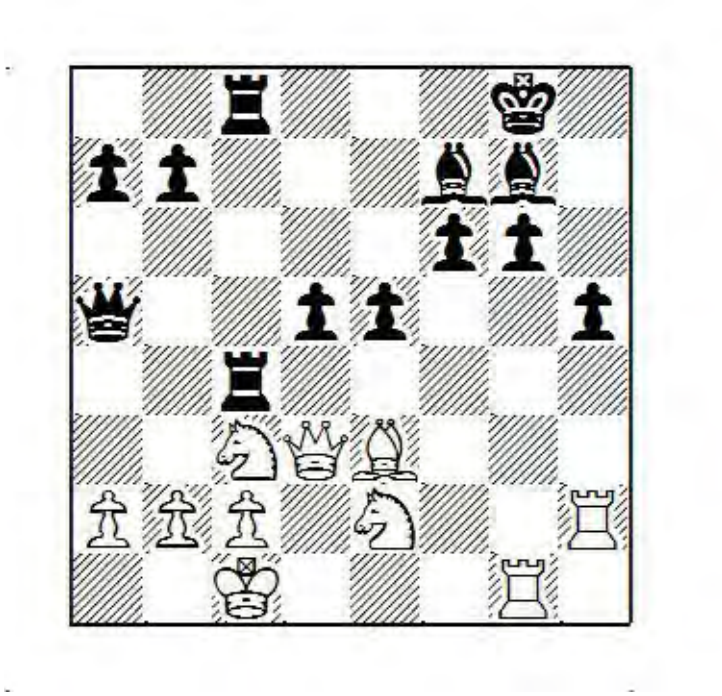
20 e6

We have seen this idea a couple of times already, but in this case, White can actually make a decent case for capturing on d6 instead. For instance, 20 exd6 exd6 21 Bd4! Bxe2 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Nxe2 Qxd2+ 24 Kxd2 f5 is a fascinating endgame. My computer claims a small advantage for White, but in no way do I feel certain that it is correct in that evaluation.

20 ... Bxe6 21 Bd4 f6 22 Qe3 Bf7 23 Qh3 h5

It appears that Black is having the situation under control and the pawns on the kingside will start their march forward.

24 Qd3 Rec8 25 Rh2 e5 26 Be3 d5?!



Question: This is getting exciting, getting those pawns forward, isn't it?

Answer: Yes, it is fascinating to play in this fashion. Of course, you cannot count on winning every time.

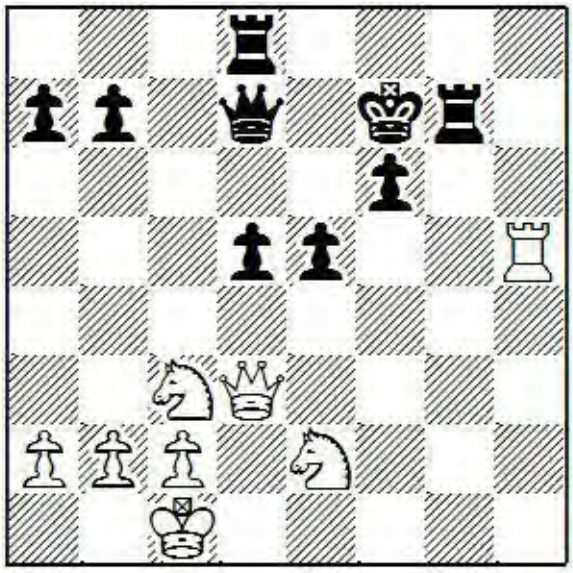
Exercise: Try to work out why Black's previous move was a mistake, what Black should have played instead and what White should play now.

Answer: Even though this is a correspondence game, it is not without mistakes. Here Black got a little overeager with his central pawns and it is hard to blame him. Honestly speaking, who wouldn't have made that mistake here? However, 26 ... Rg4! is more accurate, even if White recovers a little material, as after 27 Rxg4 hxg4 28 Qxd6 f5 29 Bxa7 Qd8! (29 ... Qxa7? is easily refuted with 30 Nd5! Bxd5 31 Qxd5+ Kf8 32 Qd6+ Kf7 33 Qd7+, and White is winning) 30 Qb4 Qc7, Black retains a large advantage.

27 Rxg6!

The only way for White to keep the game alive, but it also turns out to be a legitimately good move.

27 ... Bxg6 28 Qxg6 Qc7 29 Rxh5 Qd7 30 Qh7+ Kf7 31 Bh6 Rg4 32 Bxg7 Rxg7 33 Qd3 Rd8



This is an odd position with an interesting material distribution. If the black king had now been tucked away on a8, I think he would have had good chances of winning the game. But in its presently exposed position, Black has to exercise much care to not endanger it any further, and pushing the pawns will definitely fall in this category. Black therefore has to aim to either exchange some pieces, say the queens or a pair of rooks, or get the king to safety. It turns out both are very difficult to accomplish.

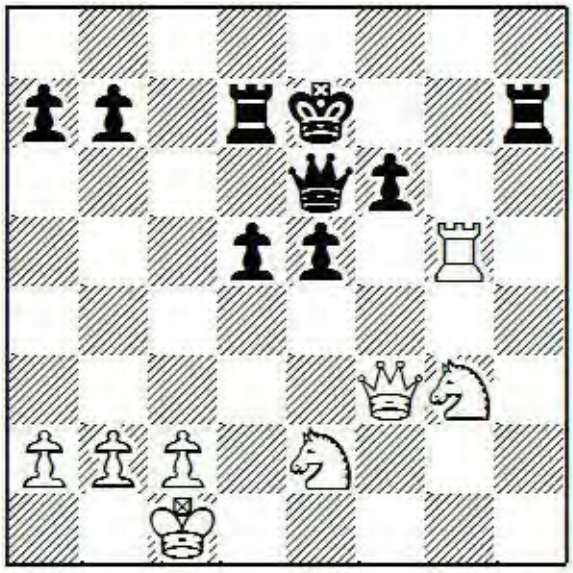
34 Rh4 Qe6 35 Ng3 Rd7 36 Nce2 Kg8 37 Qf3

The computer also likes 37 Nf5 Rg5 38 Neg3 intending 38 ... e4 39 Qf1 when the forced 39 ... Rh7 leads to a perpetual check after 40 Rxh7 Kxh7 41 Qh3+ Kg6 42 Qh6+ Kf7 43 Qh7+ Kf8 44 Qh8+ Kf7 45 Qh7+.

37 ... Rh7 38 Rg4+ Kf8 39 Rg6

Once again, 39 Nf5!? looks attractive and after 39 ... d4 40 Rg6 Kf7 41 Qg4 Qxa2 42 Nh6+ Ke7 43 Ng8+ Kd8 44 Nxf6, Black has an interesting perpetual check mill with 44 ... Qa1+ 45 Kd2 Qa5+ 46 Kd1 Rh1+ 47 Ng1 Qa1+ 48 Kd2 Rh2+ 49 Ne2 Qa5+ and the white king has no choice but to return to d1, allowing another cycle of checks.

39 ... Kf7 40 Rg5 Ke7 41 Rg6 Kf7 42 Rg5 Ke7



43 Nf5+?!

Apparently playing for a win, otherwise 43 Rg6 would have headed straight towards the draw.

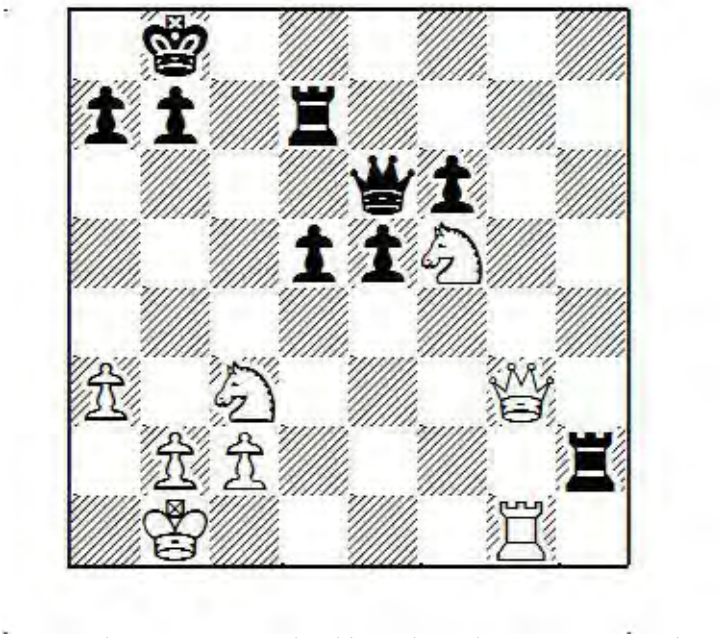
43 ... Kd8 44 Rg6 Qf7 45 Rg1 Kc7 46 Kb1 Kb8

The black king is finally where it wants to be: far, far away from White's tricky knights and heavy pieces.

47 Nc3 Qe6 48 a3 Rh2 49 Qg3 Rh8 50 Qf3 Rh2?!

Inviting a draw by repetition. But I think Black can do better. One line is 50 ... d4!? 51 Ne4 Qc6 52 Rg6 Rc7 53 Rxf6 Qxc2+ 54 Ka2 a6, creating a breathing hole for the black king and him to leave the back rank with the h8-rook. While this position is not a certain win for Black, it definitely is a better chance than the game continuation.

51 Qg3 ½-½



Here a draw was agreed. This makes almost no sense, since Black has reached the kind of position he would have wanted when he entered this messy endgame. One thing for sure, it would be pretty hard to guess this final position had started from a Sicilian Dragon!

Game 45
J.Nunn-A.Khalifman
Wijk aan Zee 1991

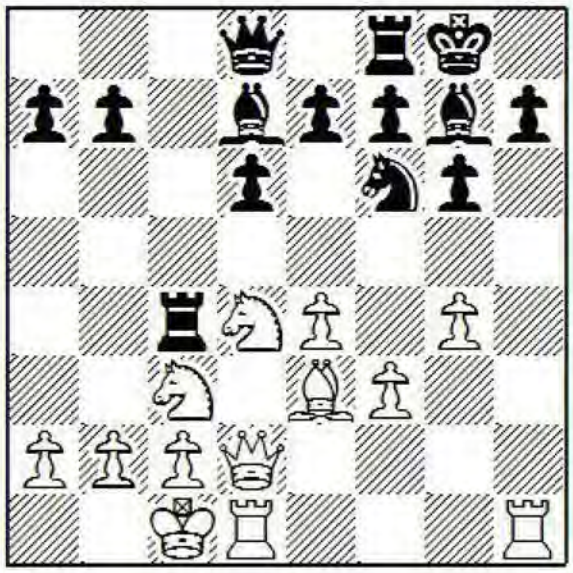
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 h4 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 0-0-0 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 h5 Nxh5 15 g4

A forced draw is the correct result after 15 Nde2 Qa5 16 g4 Ng3 17 Nxg3 Bxc3:

a) 18 bxc3 Rxc3 19 Bd4 Qa3+ 20 Kb1 Be6 21 Bxc3 Bxa2+ 22 Ka1 Bb3+ 23 Kb1 Ba2+ with a draw.

b) White can still go on to lose after 18 Qh2?? Bxb2+ 19 Kxb2 Qb4+ (19 ... Qc3+! is even better as 20 Kc1 Qxe3+ 21 Rd2 h5 22 gxh5 Rfc8 wraps up the game) 20 Kc1 Qa3+ 21 Kd2 Rxc2+ 22 Kxc2 Qxa2+ and here, White resigned in V.Knox-A.Mestel, Eastbourne 1990.

15 ... Nf6



16 Nb3

White has a ridiculous number of alternatives at this juncture. The main games feature the most important moves, but in this note we will go over some of the more interesting alternatives for White.

a) 16 b3 Rc5 17 Nf5 (ironically, the ultra-sharp 17 Ne6 tends towards a draw after 17 ... fxe6 18 Bxc5 dxc5 19 e5 Nd5 20 Nxd5 exd5 21 Qxd5+ e6 22 Qxd7 Qg5+ 23 Rd2 Qxe5 24 Rdd1 Rxf3 25 Qe7 Qb2+ 26 Kd2 Qd4+ 27 Kc1 Qa1+ 28 Kd2 Qc3+ 29 Kc1 Qb2+ 30 Kd2 Qc3+ 31 Kc1 and a truce was reached in J.Menac Comas-J.Mellado Trivino, Manresa 2012) 17 ... Rxc3! 18 Bh6 (18 Nxg7 is another possibility, but it can lead to a draw after 18 ... Rxe3 19 Qxe3 Kxg7 20 Qh6+ Kg8 21 g5 Nh5 22 Rxh5 gxh5 23 Rh1 Qa5 24 Rxh5 Qe1+ 25 Kb2 Bf5 26 exf5 Qe5+) 18 ... Rxf3 19 Bxg7 Nxg4 20 Rxh7 Rxf5 21 exf5 Kxh7 and Black is winning, A.Wikner-T.Ernst, Haparanda 1994.

b) 16 Kb1 Re8 and now:

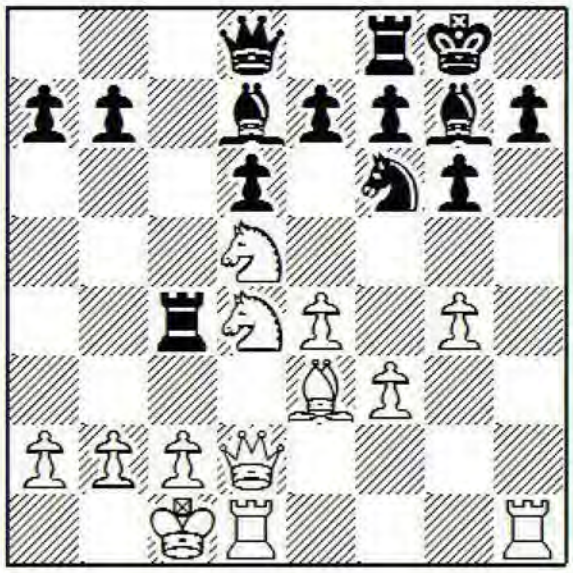
b1) 17 Nb3 a5 18 e5 Nxg4 19 fxg4 Bxg4 20 e6 Bxe6 21 Bd4 f6 22 Be3 Bf7 23 Bh6 Bh8 24 Qd3 a4 25 Nd4 Qc8 26 Rdg1 Rxc3 27 bxc3 Qc4 28 Kc1 Qxa2 29 Qh3 was agreed drawn in T.Winckelmann-M.De Blasio, correspondence 2005.

b2) 17 b3 Rc8 18 Bh6 Bh8 19 Nce2 Qc7!? 20 Bg5 b5 21 Nf5 Bxf5 22 gxf5 b4 is unclear with mutual chances.

b3) 17 e5 dxe5 18 Nf5 gxf5 19 g5 Ng4 20 fxg4 Rd4 21 Bxd4 exd4 22 gxf5 Bxf5 23 Qf2 Qa5 with a very pleasant position for Black, N.Robledo-L.Martin Rebollo, correspondence 2005.

b4) 17 Nd5 e5!? 18 Nxf6+ Qxf6 19 g5 Qe7 20 Nb3 f5 21 Na5 (21 Qh2 Rec8 22 Qxh7+ Kf7 23 Rh4 f4 24 Bxf4 Rxc2 and Black is clearly the player with the most fun as the White attack is going nowhere) 21 ... Rc7 22 Bxa7 Be6 23 Qxd6 Qf7 24 Bb6 Bxa2+ 25 Kc1 Rcc8 26 Qd7 Bf8 27 exf5 gxf5 with a terribly messy position and approximately even chances, J.Roos-P.Lacko, correspondence 2001.

c) 16 Nd5 is an invention of the late Soviet grandmaster Efim Geller.



White's idea is to trade off the f6-knight and hence weaken the defence of the h7-pawn. Black can counter with:

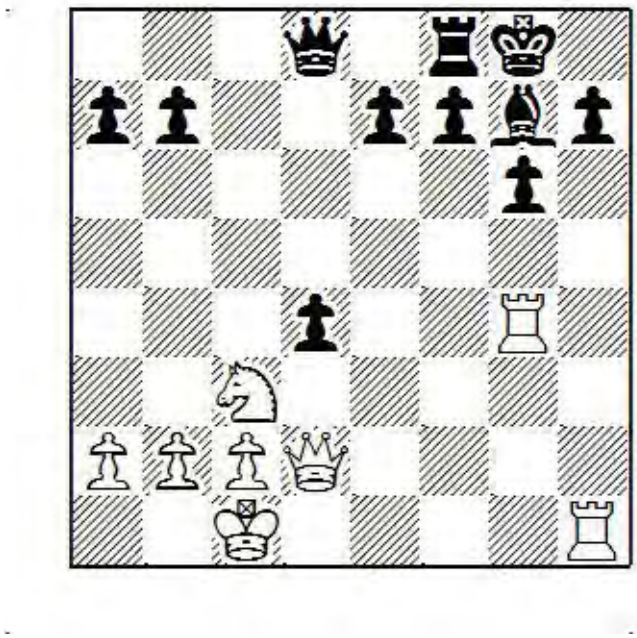
c1) 16 ... e6 17 Nxf6+ Qxf6 18 Qh2 Rfc8 19 Kb1 (19 Qxh7+ Kf8 20 Kb1 e5 21 Nf5 gxf5 22 gxf5 Rxc2 23 Rhg1 Re2 24 Bg5 Rcc2 25 Bxf6 Rxb2+ a draw by perpetual check, A.Bragin-A.Maiorov, correspondence 1997) 19 ... e5 20 g5?! (20 Qxh7+ transposes to 19 Qxh7+ line above) 20 ... Qe7 21 Nf5? (21 Ne2 Rxc2 22 Qxh7+ Kf8 is the relatively less evil, but is still better for Black) 21 ... gxf5 22 Qxh7+ Kf8 23 exf5 Rxc2 24 Qxg7+ Kxg7 25 f6+ Qxf6 26 gxf6+ Kxf6 27 Rh6+ was played in V.Kupreichik-A.Khalifman, Minsk 1987, and now Black should have played 27 ... Ke7 28 Bg5+ Kf8 29 Rhxd6 Bf5 30 Ka1 Be6 with the extra pawn and the initiative.

c2) 16 ... Nxd5 17 exd5 Qc7 18 Qh2 h5 19 gxh5 Rc8 20 Kb1 (or 20 hxg6 Bf5! 21 gxf7+ Kxf7 22 Rdg1 Rxc2+ 23 Nxc2 Bxb2+ 24 Kd1 Bxc2+ 25 Ke1 Qa5+ 26 Kf2 Qxd5 and Black is better, J.Morgado-M.Valvo, correspondence 1979) 20 ... Bf5 21 Nxf5 Rxc2 22 hxg6 Rxb2+! Qxb2 Bxb2 24 Rc1 Bxc1 25 Rxc1 fxg6 26 Nh6+ Kf8 27 Rxc7 Rxc7 with a favourable endgame for Black's rook against White's knight and bishop, K.Elison-T.Andresen, correspondence 1995.

d) 16 Qh2 Rxc3! (the usual remedy) 17 bxc3 Qa5 18 Nb3 Qa3+ (18 ... Qa4!? is completely fine and it might be even better for Black) 19 Kb1 Be6 20 Bd4 (20 e5! taking advantage of the black queen being on the wrong square gives White better chances after 20 ... dxe5 21 Bc5 Qa6 22 Bxe7 Re8 23 Bxf6 Bxf6 24 Qxh7+ Kf8 25 g5 Bg7 26 Qh4) 20 ... Rc8 was Y.Rantanen-J.Rodriguez Cordoba, Nice 1974, and now 21 g5 Nh5 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 f4 Rxc3 offers mutual chances.

e) 16 e5!? leads to continuations that pushes our comfort level and our attachment to material values to the limit. Black sacrifices pieces, sometimes a rook, for a cluster of pawns after 16 ... Nxg4 17 fxg4 Bxg4 18 Rdg1 dxe5 19 Rxg4 with a couple of options for Black:

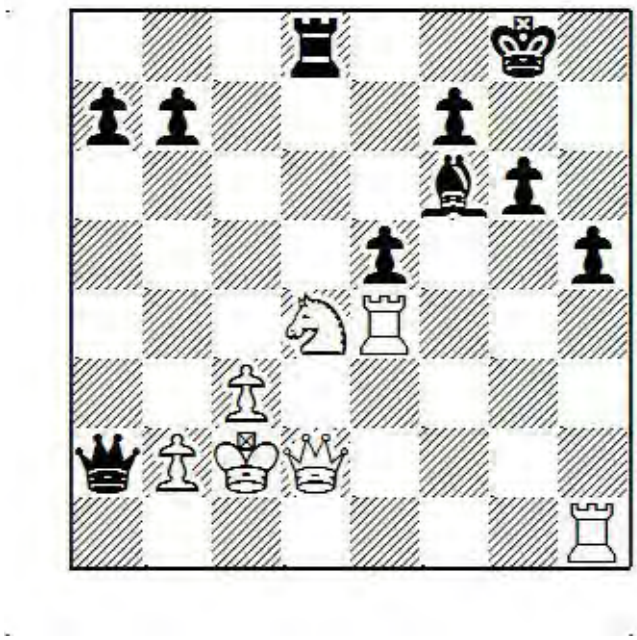
e1) 19 ... Rxd4 20 Bxd4 exd4 and here, we have a rather arcane yet typical Dragon situation.



Question: I know I said that I was beginning to like this kind of position, but here Black has sacrificed a whole rook! Is that still acceptable?

Answer: Yes it is! Black has four pawns and a powerhouse strong bishop for the rook. The evaluation? That is anybody's guess, but it is certainly more fun to play Black, advancing the pawns with care and eventually, hopefully, strangle White.

White's best move here seems to be 21 Ne2 and after 21 ... Qd5 22 Rgh4 Qxa2 23 c3 h5 24 Nxd4 Rd8 25 Kc2 Bf6 26 Re4 e5, it is anybody's game.



We have an unclear position with uneven material distribution which occurred in C.Casares Cabanas-A.Martin Gonzalez, Cala Galdana 1999.

e2) On the other hand, 19 ... h5 isn't the move you want to play to try for a win:

e21) 20 Rxh5 leads to a forced draw after 20 ... Rxd4 21 Bxd4 exd4 22 Ne4 gxh5 23 Rxg7+ Kxg7 24 Qg5+ Kh7 25 Qxh5+ Kg7, A.Chumak-V.Okhotnik, Dnipropetrovsk 1970.

e22) 20 Qe2 exd4!? 21 Rxg6 fxg6 22 Qxc4+ was S.Kramer-S.From, correspondence 1991, and now 22 ... Kh7 23 Rd1 Qb8 leads to a better game for Black.

16 ... Re8 17 Bh6

White has also tried 17 e5, leading to some interesting material constellations after 17 ... Nxg4 18 fxg4

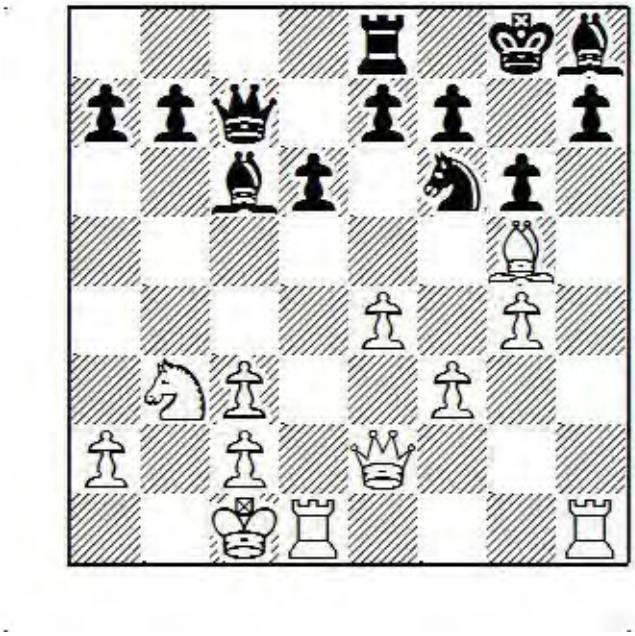
Bxg4 and now:

a) 19 e6 Bxe6 (19 ... fxe6 20 Rdg1 Qc8 21 Bd4 e5 22 Bxa7 Qe6 (22 ... Bf3!? 23 Rh2 Rg4 with another fun position with a headscratching material distribution) 23 Na5 Rxc3 24 Qxc3 Qxa2 25 Qb3+ Qxb3 26 Nxb3 with a interesting endgame, A.Kovchan-H.Erdogan, Istanbul 2007) 20 Bd4 Rxd4 21 Nxd4 Bg4 22 Rdf1 e6 23 Ne4 f5 24 Qh2 h5 25 Nxd6 Bxd4 26 Nxe8 Qxe8 27 Qc7 Be3+ 28 Kb1 Qf7 with a complicated struggle, A.Kovchan-J.Arni, Istanbul 2007.

b) 19 Rdg1 h5 20 e6 Bxe6 21 Rxh5 Qc8 22 Rhh1 Rxc3 23 bxc3 Qxc3 24 Qxc3 Bxc3 25 Bxa7 Ra8 26 Bd4 Bxd4 27 Nxd4 Bxa2 28 Nf5 Be6 29 Nxe7+ Kg7 30 c4 Ra4 31 Kb2 Rb4+ 32 Ka3 Rxc4 33 Rd1 Rc5 and here the players agreed to a draw in H.Glaser-C.Werner, correspondence 1991. However, it is far from clear that a draw is the only possible result from this position as 34 Rhf1 g5 35 Rxd6 g4 36 Kb4 Re5 37 Kc3 leaves plenty of play.

17 ... Bh8 18 Bg5 Qc8

Schneider and Sapi suggested 18 ... Bc6 in their *The Sicilian Dragon: Yugoslav 9 Bc4* and their analysis continued 19 Qe2 Rxc3 20 bxc3 Qc7 with an unclear position.



This seems like a fairly accurate assessment. However, I certainly wouldn't mind playing Black here.

19 Qh2

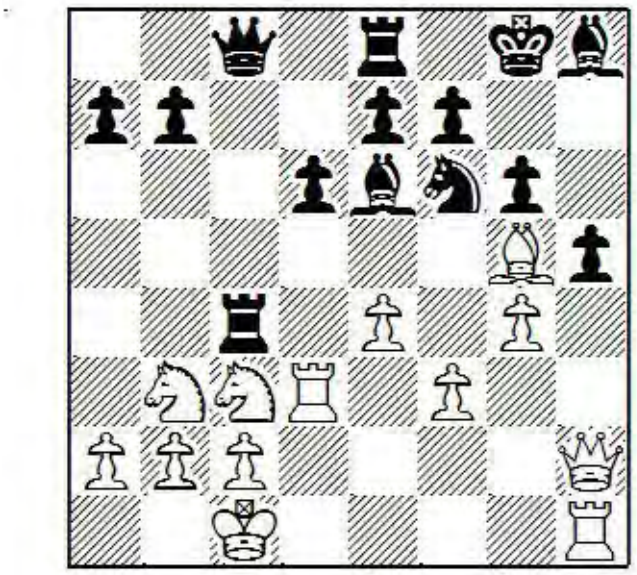
When Short first introduced 19 Rh4 in this game it looked awfully frightening, but fairly soon it was determined that Black in fact is doing rather well with 19 ... Nxg4! (19 ... Rxc3?! 20 bxc3 Be6 21 Rdh1 Bg7 22 e5 dxe5 23 Bxf6 Bxf6 24 Rxh7 Qc4 25 Kb1 Qf4 26 Qg2 and White's attack is crashing through, N.Short-A.Khalifman, Bundesliga 1991) 20 fxg4 Bxg4 21 Rg1 h5!? (21 ... Bxc3 22 bxc3 Rxe4 is an interesting alternative, which also offers Black the better chances) 22 Nd5 Rxe4 23 Ne3 Qe6 24 Nxg4 hxg4 25 Rgh1 Bg7 and Black's nice stack of pawns for the sacrificed piece and should give him the better chances, J.Von Hartlieb-M.Ahn, Muenster 1994.

19 ... Be6 20 Rd3

White is building up his attack very slowly.

Alternatively, 20 Nd5, is also quite interesting with 20 ... Bxd5 21 Rxd5 Kf8!? providing a complicated position.

20 ... h5!



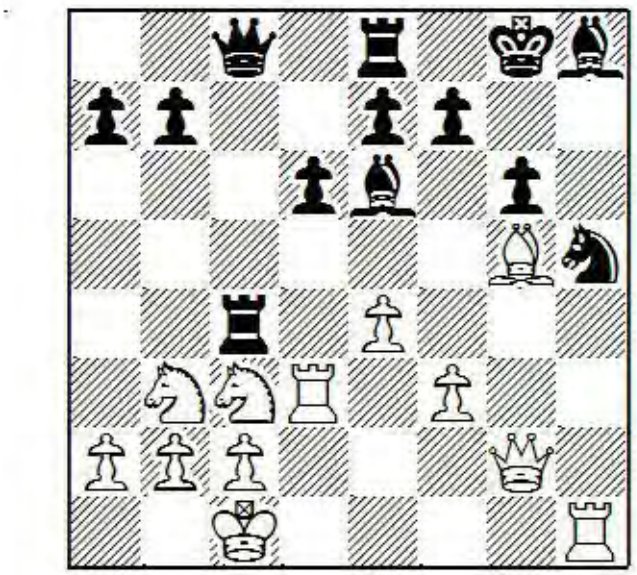
Black has to address the immediate threat of Bxf6 followed by Qxh7 and this move st the only one that fits the bill.

21 gxh5

In *ChessBase Magazine*, Boensch offers 21 Bxf6 Bxf6 22 gxh5 g5 as unclear and I concur with his view. For instance, after 23 Nd5 Be5 24 Qg2 f6 25 Kb1 Kf7 26 h6 Rh8, the position is simply arcane.

Indeed, sane minds will have a hard time making sense of the action.

21 ... Nxh5 22 Qg2



Clearing the path for the rook to take the h5-knight.

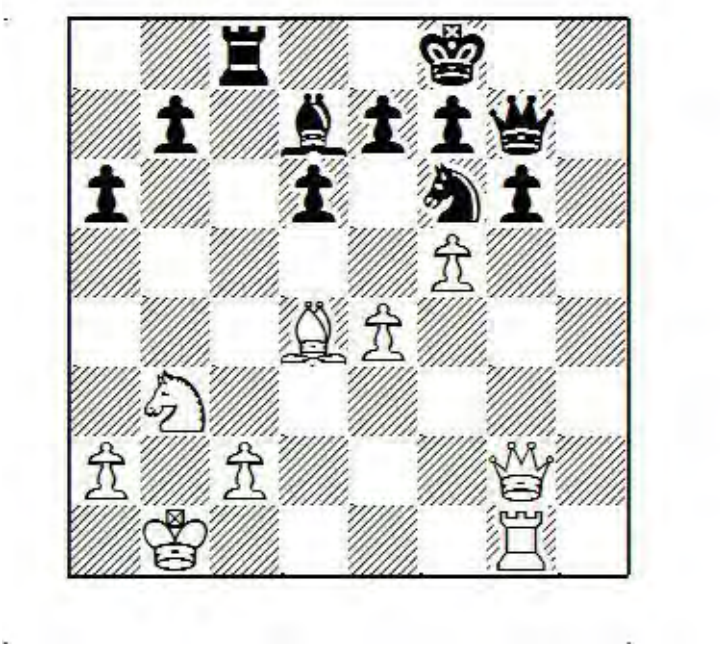
22 ... Bxc3!

Question: What is going on now?

Answer: This is an incredibly ballsy move. Black willingly exchanges the last real defender on the kingside. As I believe, Steinitz once wrote that the king is a strong piece and it can defend itself. That is occasionally the philosophy Black will have to operate with in the Dragon. Black would have been in bad shape if he tarried with 22 ... a6 23 Rxh5 gxh5 24 Be3+ Kh7 25 Qg5 Bg7 26 Qxh5+ Kg8 27 Bh6 and Black has an unpleasant position.

23 bxc3 Rxc3 24 Rxc3 Qxc3 25 Rxh5

White continues to play forcing moves. Had he claimed to have time as well as compensation for the pawn (which admittedly he has some of), then he can insist on 25 Kb1 Qg7 26 Be3 a6 27 f4 Bd7 28 f5 Rc8 29 Bd4 Nf6 30 Rg1 Kf8.



While the pressure White applies does reimburse for some of the two-pawn deficit, it is hard to believe that there is full compensation.

25 ... Bxb3

Ridding White of a key defender; now a draw will become inevitable.

26 axb3 Qa1+ 27 Kd2 Rc8 28 Rh2 Qd4+ 29 Kc1

Trying to stop the checks doesn't look immediately logical thanks to the many, many pawns Black has. However, it still looks like a draw will be the outcome, after say 29 Ke1 Qa1+ 30 Ke2 Rxc2+ 31 Bd2 Qb2 32 Qg5 Qxb3 33 Qh6 Qb5+ 34 Ke3 Qc5+ 35 Kd3 Qc4+ 36 Ke3 Qc5+ with another draw by repetition.

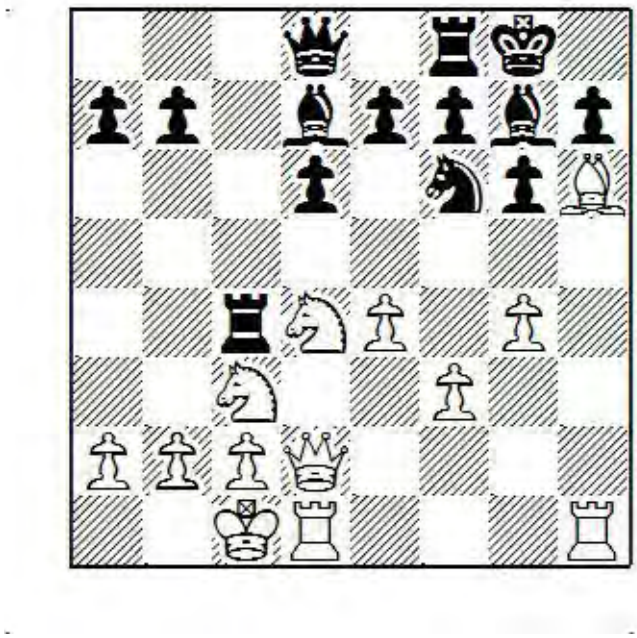
29 ... Qa1+ 30 Kd2 Qd4+ 31 Kc1 ½-½

And since the checks will keep coming, the players settled for a draw.

Game 46
J.Nunn-L.Ljubojevic
Amsterdam 1988

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 h4 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 0-0-0 Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 h5 Nxh5 15 g4 Nf6 16 Bh6

An interesting choice by the English grandmaster John Nunn, who, thanks to his *Beating the Sicilian* books, was considered one of the leading experts on how to play the White side in the Sicilian, including the Dragon. This move has also been played by Kasparov. The next couple of moves are more or less forced and the result is a typically fascinating Dragon position.



Question: Let me guess, Black exchanges on h6 to divert the queen?

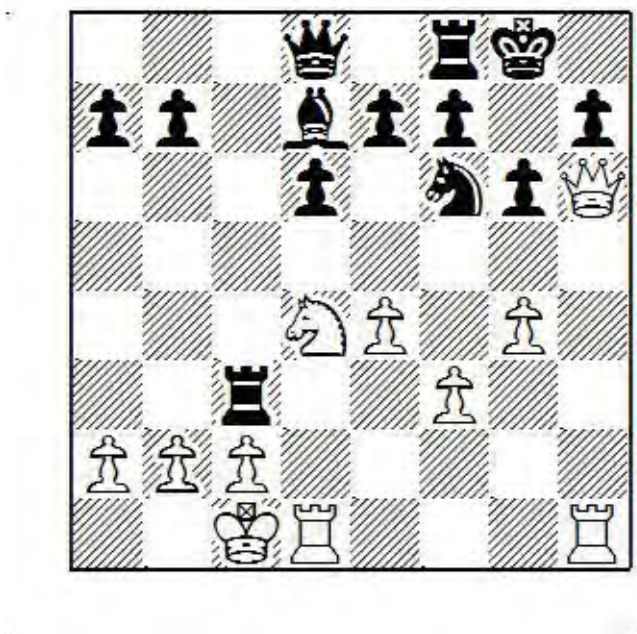
Answer: No, in this case it is not such a good idea. Instead Black has a far more effective move ...

16 ... Nxe4!

Of course! When White played his bishop to h6, he removed the guard of the d4-knight. Black's move immediately seeks to exploit this.

Question: But what's really wrong with 16 ... Bxh6? Surely, after 17 Qxh6 Rxc3 18 bxc3 Qa5, Black has sufficient compensation?

Answer: Well, White doesn't have to recapture on move 18.



After 18 g5!! Nh5 19 Rxh5! gxh5 20 Rh1, Black gets murdered down the h-file.

17 Qe3!

The alternatives work badly:

a) Against the attractive 17 Qh2, Black has a simple solution available in 17 ... Be5! 18 Bf4 Bxf4+ 19 Qxf4 e5! 20 Qh2 Ng5 21 Qh6 f6 22 f4, A.Istratescu-Y.Stisis, Biel 1994, and here the simplest way forward is probably 22 ... exf4 23 Nf3 Rf7 24 Nxg5 fxg5 25 Rxd6 Rc6 26 Rdd1 Rxc3!? 27 bxc3 Qa5

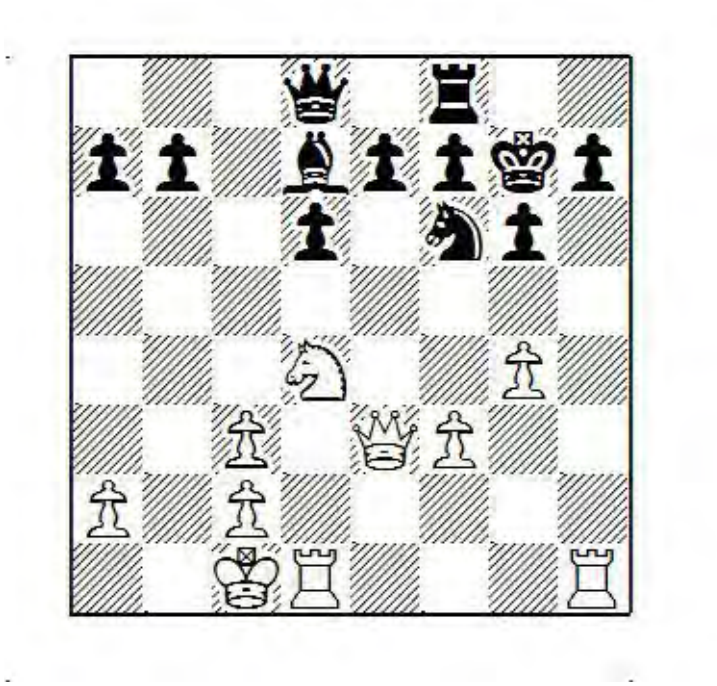
when Black has every chance of winning the game.

b) The other alternative 17 Nxe4 Rxd4 18 Qh2 also looks appealing, but once again Black can resort to 18 ... Be5! 19 f4 Rxd1+ 20 Rxd1 Bh8!? (my engine offers 20 ... Bxb2+ 21 Kxb2 Bxg4 22 Rd2 Qb6+ 23 Kc1 Rd8 24 Qh4 Qg1+ 25 Kb2 f6 26 Nxf6+ exf6 27 Qxf6 Qb6+ with even chances) 21 Rh1 (21 Bxf8 Qxf8 22 Qh4 f5 23 gxf5 Bxf5 leaves Black with ample compensation for the exchange in the form of a gorgeous bishop pair) 21 ... Qb6 22 Bg7 h5 23 Bxh8 Qe3+ 24 Nd2, P.Rasmussen-E.Szalanczy, Budapest 1993, and here, Black should have opted for the very elegant 24 ... Kxh8! 25 gxh5 g5!, bringing White's attack to a standstill after 26 fxg5 Rc8 27 Qh4 Bf5 with an irresistible attack.

17 ... Rxc3!

Necessary, but good, removing one of the pieces White needs to break down Black's defence on the kingside.

18 bxc3 Nf6 19 Bxg7 Kxg7



Question: This looks pretty scary. Can't White just stack up everything on the h-file and win?

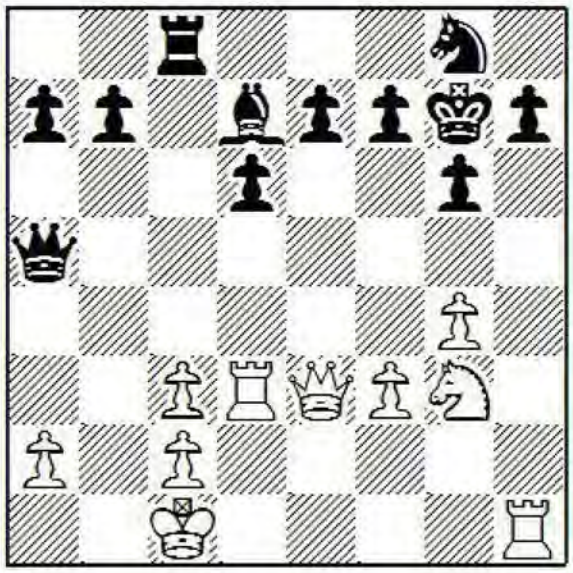
Answer: If only chess was that easy. In this case, Black has many defensive resources and while stacking everything up on the h-file is a dangerous plan, Black has sufficient resources to defend against that idea. In particular, by sacrificing the exchange on c3, Black has eradicated the threat of Nd5, which aims at removing the Nf6, the defender of the crucial h7-square.

This is the starting position in this variation, one that has been tested at all levels of play.

White's key idea is obviously to break through on the h-file to mate Black. Black, for obvious reasons, should try to avoid this!

20 Rh2

A key alternative for White is 20 Ne2 when 20 ... Qa5! is Black's strongest move. After 21 Ng3 Rc8 22 Rd3. Black has the outstanding knight retreat 22 ... Ng8! (22 ... Be6 is the theoretical main line, but it is not as strong as our untested move, which promises Black the better game).



White's potential kingside threats are thus nullified. After 23 Qd4+ f6!, we now notice that White struggles to find a plan, whereas Black enjoys an easy game with many targets to aim at. One possible continuation that illustrates this with all necessary clarity is 24 Qb4 Qa6! 25 Ne4 Rc4 26 Qb3 Be6! 27 Nd2 Re4 28 c4 (28 Qb2? Ra4 is even worse) 28 ... Rxc4 29 Qb2 Ra4 with an enduring initiative for Black.

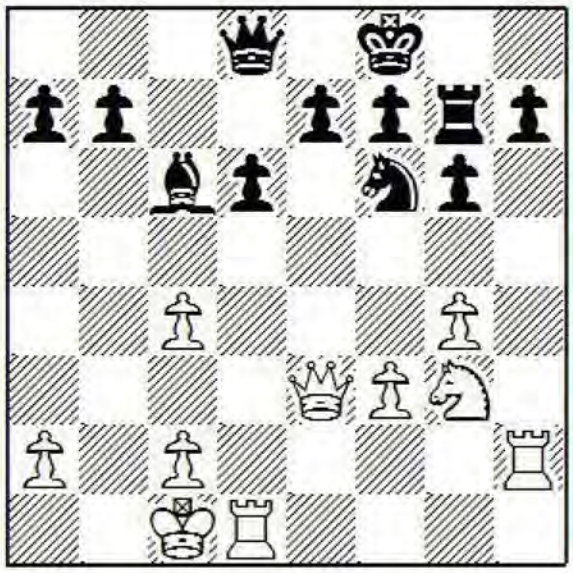
20 ... Rg8

The engine suggests a surprising new move with 20 ... e5 and White can meet it with 21 Nf5+!? (or 21 Ne2 Qa5 22 Qh6+ Kg8 23 Qh4 Kg7 24 Qh6+ with a repetition of moves) 21 ... Bxf5 22 gxf5 Qc7 23 Qh6+ Kg8 24 Qg5 Kg7 and again we have a move repetition.

21 Ne2 Bc6 22 Ng3 Kf8 23 c4

In this position, 23 g5 was once recommended with the expectation that it would lead to an advantage for White, but matters are far from clear after 23 ... Nd5 24 Qxa7 Nxc3 25 Rd3 Nb5 26 Qe3 Rg7 (26 ... Qa5!? is recommending by my engine with 27 Re2 Qd8 28 Rh2 Qa5 leading to a draw by repetition of moves) 27 Re2 (27 Ne2!? may be better, for example after 27 ... Nc7 28 Nd4 Bd7 29 f4 Na6 30 Ra3 and White's position is a bit easier to play because, Black's pieces are poorly coordinated) 27 ... Nc7 28 Re1 Nd5 29 Qd2 Qa8 with chances to both sides, C.Cusmir-G.Boonet, correspondence 1995.

23 ... Rg7



Question: This looks very odd. That rook most certainly cannot be well-placed on g7? It is not a bishop as far as I can see. So what is it doing there?

Answer: Even though it looks a strange, there is a method to the madness. Black's idea is to play his knight to d7 and further on to c5 at some point, and then Black can also play ... f7-f6 and have the rook guard the e-pawn as well. Thus, the 'fianchettoed' rook fulfils a useful defensive function as Black regroups.

This solid move is certainly more ambitious than 23 ... Qa5 which will likely lead the game straight to a draw after 24 Re1 e6 (or 24 ... Kg7 25 g5 Nd7 26 Qxe7 Qa3+ 27 Kb1 Qb4+ 28 Kc1 Qa3+ repeating the moves) 25 g5 Nd7 26 Rxh7 Rg7 27 Rh8+ Rg8 28 Rh7 Rg7 and a draw by repetition is forthcoming.

24 Re2

Worthy of consideration is 24 c5!? and after 24 ... d5 25 c4 e6 26 g5 Nd7 27 cxd5 exd5 28 Ne2, White has better chances than he obtained in our main game.

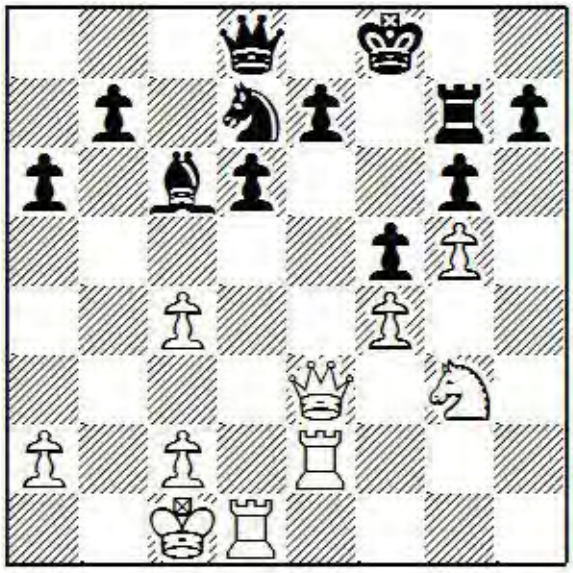
24 ... a6

White doesn't really threaten to take the a7-pawn as the f3-pawn is a heavy price to leave hanging. Thus, Black could consider 24 ... Nd7 25 g5 b6 followed by either ... f7-f5 or ... Nc5 and ... Qd7 with a pleasant game.

25 g5

This followed by White's next move in the game appear like the logical way for White to proceed. But White's initiative peters out very quickly. Therefore an interesting alternative could be 25 Rde1!? Ng8! 26 Ne4 f6 (no knights allowed on the g5-square) 27 g5 Bxe4 28 Qxe4 fxg5 29 Qxb7 Rf7 with a complicated and messy middlegame. Black definitely has sufficient material for the exchange but his pieces are not exactly well-coordinated.

25 ... Nd7 26 f4 f5!

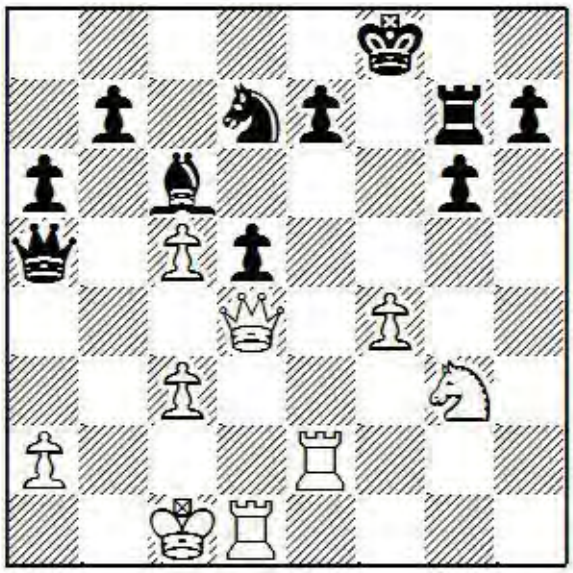


Black stops White from claiming more space on the kingside and, as we will see, this move all of a sudden allows Black some piece coordination that decidedly appeared absent before with the rook on g7.

27 gxf6 Nxf6 28 c5 d5 29 Qd4?!

Possibly better is 29 Ne4, for instance after 29 ... Nxe4 30 Qxe4 dxe4 31 Rxd8+ Kf7 32 Kd2 Kf6 33 Rf8+ Ke6 with a position that is evaluated as equal by my computer, but I rather fancy Black's chances in this endgame. White's pawns are all isolated or doubled and there is very little coordination for White's pieces. Black has two pawns for the exchange and should have decent chances of winning, even if it will not be easy.

29 ... Qa5 30 c3 Nd7



31 c4?

White tries to create a little confusion, but in fact it just hastens the road towards defeat. Instead White should have tried 31 Rg1!? with some interesting tactical ideas as 31 ... Qa3+ 32 Kb1 Qxc5 33 Nf5!? (this is possible because of the g1-rook's placement) 33 ... Qxd4 34 Nxd4 Nc5 35 f5 Ke8 36 Re5 Kd7 37 fxg6 hxg6 38 c4 Kd6 39 Reg5 Rf7 40 Rxg6+ e6 and even though my engine only claims a small advantage for Black, only Black can win this position.

31 ... Qa3+ 32 Kb1 Qb4+ 33 Rb2?!

Here, 33 Kc1 Qxc4+ 34 Qxc4 dxc4 35 Ne4 looks somewhat more promising than the game continuation, but nevertheless, Black has the clearly better chances in the endgame after 35 ... h6 (or 35 ... e5 36 fxe5 Re7 37 Nd6 Nxc5 38 Nxc4 Kg7 and Black again has all the chances in the endgame) 36 Rg1 Kf7 37 Kc2 Rh7 38 Nd2 Nxc5 39 Nxc4 Nd7 with an unpleasant defensive task ahead for White.

33 ... Qxc4 34 Ne2

The lesser evil is 34 Qxc4 but nonetheless 34 ... dxc4 35 Rb4 e6 36 Rxc4 Rf7 can only be good for Black.

34 ... Nxc5 35 Rc2

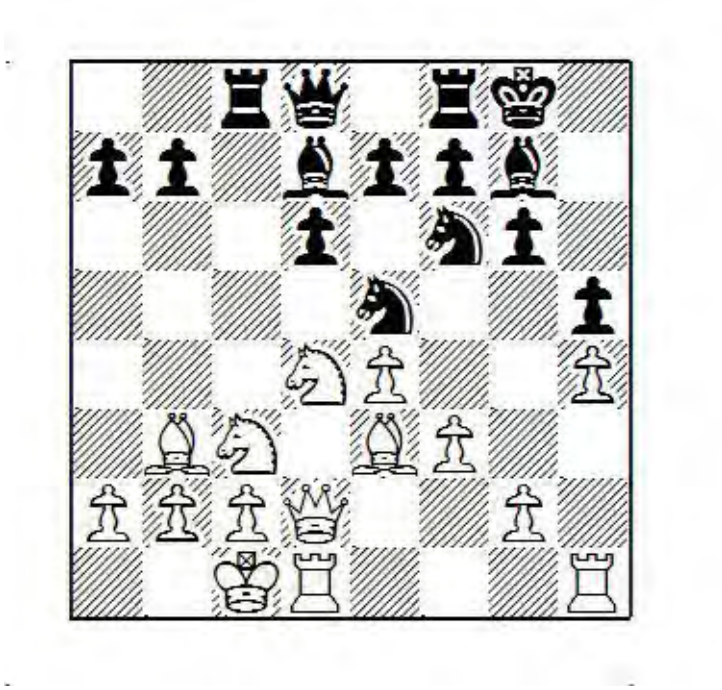
Forcing a liquidation into an endgame that is fairly simple for Black to win.

35 ... Qxd4 36 Nxd4 Ba4 37 Rxc5 Bxd1 38 Ne6+ Kf7 39 Nxg7 Kxg7 40 Rxd5 Bf3 0-1

Having reached the time control at move 40, White decided it not worthwhile to continue. White has no way of creating any counterplay and will have to watch while Black advances his h-pawn and activates his king. So while a little premature, it is hard to fault White for not wanting to sit through that suffering.

Chapter Ten
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: The Soltis Variation – 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 h4 h5

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 h4 h5



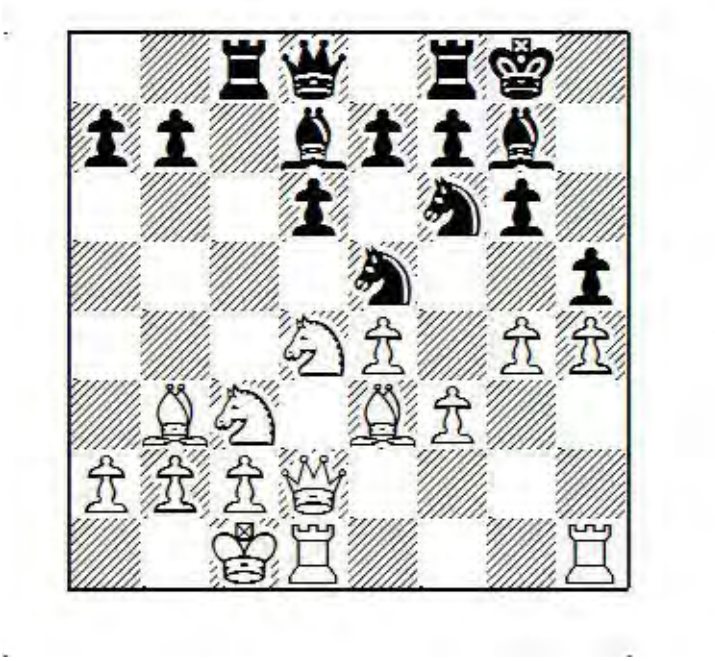
The position after Black's 12th move is called the Soltis Variation, named after the American Grandmaster Andrew 'Andy' Soltis.

Black stops White from playing the h4-h5 pawn sacrifice that opens the h-file. If White now has to open up for a kingside attack, he needs to first sacrifice a pawn with g2-g4 and then play h4-h5. There is, of course, a cost to playing ... h7-h5. Black's kingside pawn structure gets considerably weakened, in particular the g6-pawn seems soft in several variations. That being said, this line has been a go-to line for most of the highly regarded Dragon endorsers such as Carlsen, Topalov, Kiril Georgiev, Sosonko, Miles, Petursson and Tiviakov.

An attempt to prove that Black's opening is a mistake and White can refute it, is being made in Game 47, when White throws 13 g4 at Black, though this premature punt is not something for Black to worry about. Much more reasonable is the 13 Bh6 variation which was once thought of as highly problematic for Black, but it isn't considered that critical any more. In Game 48, Black plays the solid 13 ... Nc4 which also avoids the main line exchange sacrifice 13 ... Bxh6 14 Qxh6 Rxc3 15 bxc3. In Game 49, Black plays the old main line 15 ... Qa5, whereas some of the newer alternatives, 15 ... Qc7, 15 ... Qc8 and 13 ... a5 are discussed in Game 50. 13 Bg5 Rc5 is by far the most popular continuation of the Soltis Variation. Now we again reach a point where there are several paths to choose from. In Game 51, White gives up on the idea of an immediate kingside attack and instead focuses on breaking in the centre with 14 f4. The kingside attack option 14 g4 hxg4 15 h5 is examined in Game 52, although this, like 13 g4, shouldn't worry Black unduly. Another approach is 15 f4 Nc4 and now 16 Qd3, as seen in Game 53, is pleasant for Black, whereas the sharper and more critical 16 Qe2 is covered in Game 54. White's best option is currently 14 Kb1, taking a cautious approach while making a semi-useful waiting move. In Game 55, Carlsen plays 14 ... Re8, which is undoubtedly Black's best choice. The much sharper and combative 14 ... b5 15 g4 a5 is covered in detail in Game 56.

Game 47
M.Milenkovic-S.Mladenovic
Serbian Team Championship, Kraljevo 2014

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 Bb3 Rc8 11 0-0-0 Ne5 12 h4 h5 13 g4?!



Question: Is this sound? White doesn't seem to have enough to break and enter since the g4 square is covered four times by Black.

Answer: With this move, White claims that Black's previous move is a mistake that can be refuted, and the way to do so is immediately crack a pawn on Black's pawn shield. In fact, this is exactly what Black hopes for, an opponent who starts sacrificing material without consideration of the actual position on the board. However, Black must remain vigilant and make sure all the kingside tricks are covered.

13 ... hxg4!

"Thank you for your gift, please show me what else you've got."

14 h5

When you say "A", you must say "B". Also, 14 f4 is by no means any better and after 14 ... Nc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 e5 (or 16 h5 Nxh5 17 f5 Qa5 18 Kb1 Rxc3! 19 bxc3 Rc8 20 fxg6 fxg6 21 Nb3 Qxc3 22 Qxc3 Rxc3 and Black is winning, C.Chase-D.Vigorito, Lowell 1993) 16 ... Nh5 (now White's attack is stalled) 17 Qd3 Qc8 18 exd6 exd6 19 Ncb5 (19 Nd5 Re8 is equally hideous), B.Maryasin-V.Litvinov, Minsk 1981, now best would be 19 ... Nxf4 20 Bxf4 Bxb5 21 Nxb5 Rxf4 and Black is nearly winning.

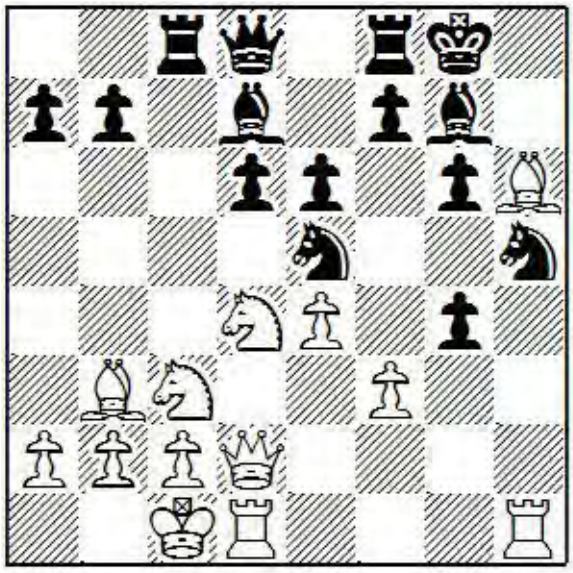
14 ... Nxh5

"Thank you once again for your gifts, please show me what else you've got."

15 Rdg1

In some top level games, White tested 15 Bh6:

a) After 15 ... e6, he really did not get anywhere.

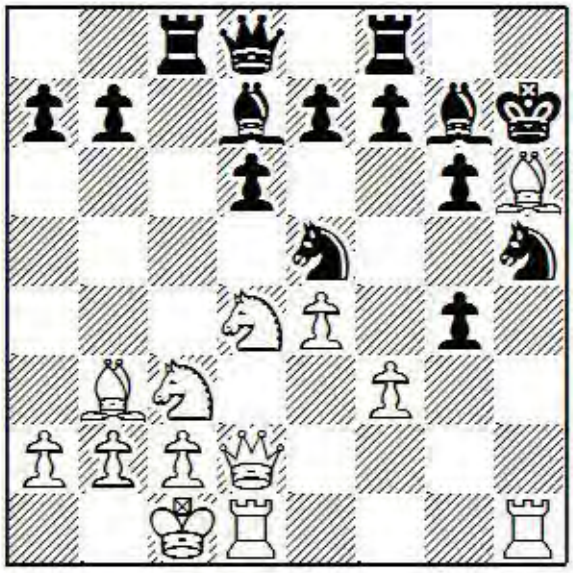


Black's last move covers the g5-square and blocks the Bc4, antipates the threat of Rxh5 followed by Qg4 when ... Nxg6 is met by Qxg6 Here, White can try:

a1) 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 f4 (or 17 Rdg1 Rh8 18 fxg4 Nf6 19 g5 Nh5 20 Rh3 Rc5 21 Nf3 Qe7 with the somewhat better chances for Black, R.Calvo Minguez-G.Sosonko, Cala Galdana 1974) 17 ... Nc4 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 Nde2 Bc6 20 Qd3 b5 21 Kb1 Qf6 22 Rhf1 Rc8, and White is down two pawns with no discernable compensation, J.Fedorowicz-M.Petursson, Reykjavik 1990.

a2) 16 Rdg1!? Qf6! 17 Bxg7 Qxg7 18 fxg4 Nf6 19 g5 Nh5 20 Nce2 Nc4 21 Qb4?! (21 Bxc4 Rxc4 22 Kb1 Rfc8 23 c3 Qe5 gives Black a marginal advantage) 21 ... a5! 22 Qxb7 Ne5 23 c3 Nd3+ 24 Kb1 Nc5 25 Qb6 Qe5 26 Bc2? (26 Rh4 Nxe4 is naturally clearly better for Black) 26 ... Rb8 27 Qxa5 Rxb2+! 28 Kxb2 Nd3+ and White resigned in L.Ljubojevic-A.Miles, Brussels 1986.

b) 15 ... Kh7!? has mostly been played in lower level games.



This is quite possibly an improvement over 15 ... e6. The one grandmaster game in this line went 16 Bg5 Rxc3 17 bxc3 gxf3 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 exf5, K.Mekhitarian-A.Fier, Paulista 2012, and now 19 ... Qd7 20 Qf4 Kg8 21 Qe4 e6 22 Rxh5 gxh5 23 f6 (the position "is far from clear", according to Mekhitarian, which looks about right) 23 ... Bh8 24 Rh1 f2 25 Qh4 Qc6 and now 26 Qxh5 f1Q+ 27 Rxf1 Qxc3 28 Kb1

Nd3 reaches a draw by perpetual check.

15 ... Qa5!

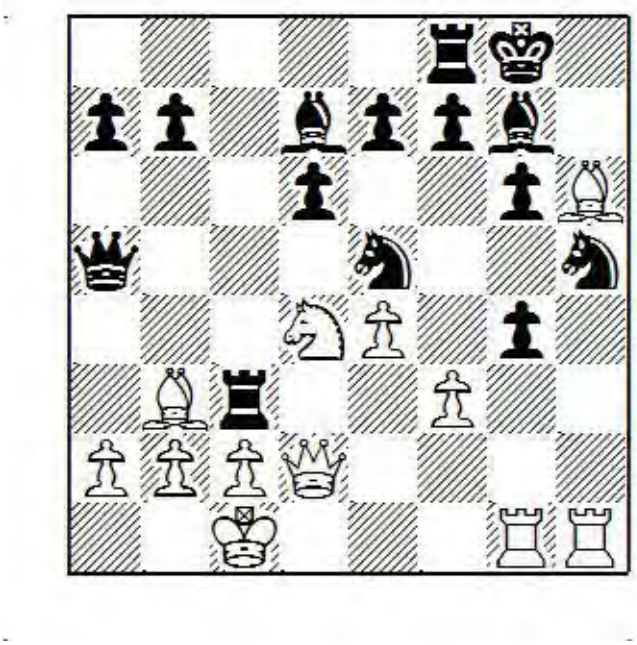
Black also had success with the autopilot move 15 ... Rxc3!? though it is far less convincing after 16 bxc3 Qc7 17 Rxh5? (White should have played 17 fxg4!? Bxg4 18 Bg5 Rc8 19 Rh4 to stay in the game and things are not entirely clear) 17 ... gxh5 18 fxg4 Nxg4 19 Bh6 and now rather than 19 ... Bf6 (Black should simply have opted for 19 ... Nxh6! 20 Qxh6 Bg4 21 Qe3 Qc5 22 Nf5 e6! with an easy win) 20 Bxf8 Kxf8 21 Rf1 e6 22 Rf3 Ke7 which certainly is better for Black, N.Getz-J.Hammer, Reykjavik 2011.

16 Bh6

Question: Can White blow open the kingside pawn cover with 16 Rxh5 instead?

Answer: The 16 Rxh5 exchange sacrifice is unnecessarily desperate and goes absolutely nowhere. After 16 ... gxh5 17 Bh6 (17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Qg5+ Ng6 and there is no more attack as 19 Nf5+ Bxf5 20 exf5 fizzles out after 20 ... e6) 17 ... Nd3+ 18 Qxd3 Bxh6+ 19 Kb1 Rxc3 20 bxc3, K.Korley-B.Smith, Philadelphia 2009, Black has 20 ... Qe5 21 fxg4 Bxg4 22 Nf5 Bf4 23 Qe2 Bg5 with a clearly winning position.

16 ... Rxc3!



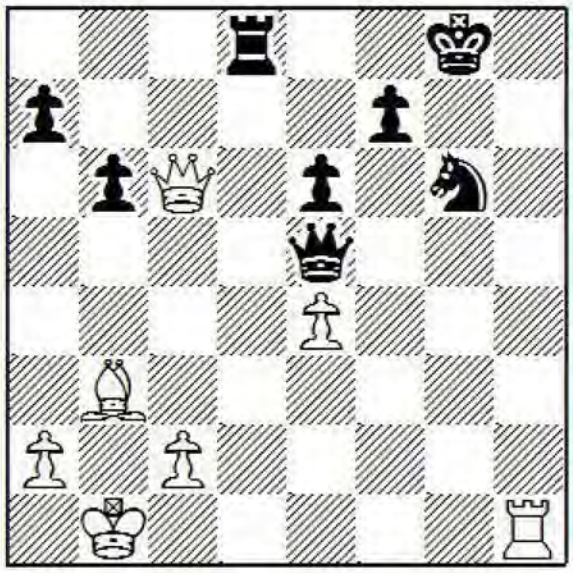
A timely standard Dragon exchange sacrifice. This forces a liquidation of material that simply leaves Black with the advantage.

17 bxc3

Here, 17 Bxg7 is efficiently met with 17 ... Rxc2+ 18 Kxc2 Rc8+ 19 Kd1 Qxd2+ 20 Kxd2 Kxg7 21 fxg4 Bxg4 (Black has three pawns for the exchange, which is more than enough for Black to win) 22 Ke3 Nf6 23 Rc1 Rc5 24 Rhg1 (nothing works for White and after 24 Rxc5 dxc5 25 Kf4 Nd3+! 26 Ke3 Nxe4! 27 Rf1 cxd4+! 28 Kxe4 Nc5+ 29 Kxd4 Nxb3+ 30 axb3 g5, Black should win without significant problems) 24 ... Bd7 25 Nf5+ Kf8 26 Nd4 Neg4+ 27 Kf3 Ne5+ (repeating the moves, probably to gain time or just to demonstrate to White that he is helpless and not able to get out of the hole) 28 Ke3 Neg4+ 29 Kf3 Rh5! 30 Rc7 Rh3+ 31 Kg2 Rh2+ 32 Kg3 Nh5+ with mate on the next move, leading White to resign in N.De Firmian-S.Kudrin, Gausdal 1982.

17 ... Bxh6 18 Qxh6 Qxc3 19 Kb1 Qxd4 20 fxg4 Bxg4 21 Rxg4 Nxg4 22 Qxg6+ Qg7 23 Qxh5 Nf2?!

I am not sure why Black played the text move unless he was happy with a draw. With 23 ... Ne5! as mentioned by Vigorito, Black fends off White's attack and it is unlikely that White has enough for his two sacrificed pawns, say after 24 Qd1 Ng6 25 Qd5 b6 26 Qd3 e6 27 Qxd6 Qe5 28 Qc6 Rd8.



Black has returned one of the pawns but now he gets his pieces activated and they have taken control of the game. Indeed, this does not augur well for the 13 g4?! variation.

24 Rh4

This allows Black to give a perpetual check, which of course he is not obliged to give. An alternative is 24 Re1, but this too will soon peter out into a draw after 24 ... Qg3 25 Rf1 e6 26 Rxf2 Qxf2 27 Qg5+ and a draw was agreed since White will soon deliver perpetual check, A.Dimitrijevic-A.Brkic, Maribor 2003.

24 ... Qg1+

The only alternative to avoid an immediate draw or loss is 24 ... e6, but even then, things tend to end in a perpetual check after 25 a3 Rc8 26 Qf3 Qd4 27 Qg3+ Kf8 28 e5 Ne4 29 Rh8+ Ke7 30 Qh4+ Kd7 31 Bxe6+ Kxe6 (31 ... fxe6 32 Qh7+ Kc6 33 Rxc8+ Kb6 34 Qc7+ Ka6 35 Ka2 d5 36 Qe7 Qxe5 37 Qb4 Qd6 38 Qxd6+ Nxd6 39 Rf8 Ne4 with two pawns for the exchange and Black should not lose, but he will likely not win either) 32 Qh3+ Ke7 (also 32 ... Kxe5 33 Qxc8 Nc3+ 34 Kb2 Ne4+ 35 Ka2 Qd5+ 36 Kb2 Qd4+ ends in perpetual check) 33 Rxc8 Qb6+ 34 Kc1 dxe5 35 Qh4+ Kd7 36 Qh3+ with another perpetual check.

25 Kb2 Nd1+ 26 Kc1

Allowing a queen trade with 26 Ka3 Qc5+ is not what White should be angling for when he is two pawns down.

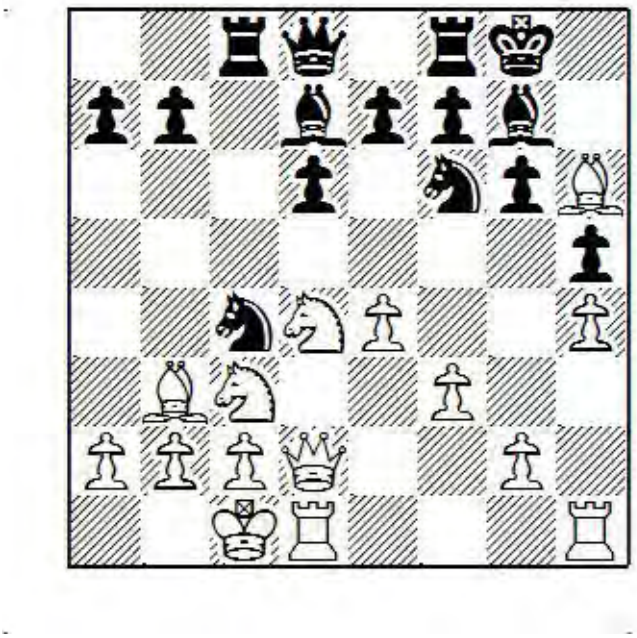
26 ... Nc3+ 27 Kb2 Nd1+ 28 Kc1 Nc3+ 29 Kd2 Qd4+ 30 Kc1 Qg1+ ½-½

Game 48
A.Gabrielian-Bu Xiangzhi
Moscow 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2 Na5

We will discuss this move further in the last chapter of the book. In this case, we transpose back into the present chapter after a few more moves.

11 h4 h5 12 Bh6 Rc8 13 0-0-0 Nc4



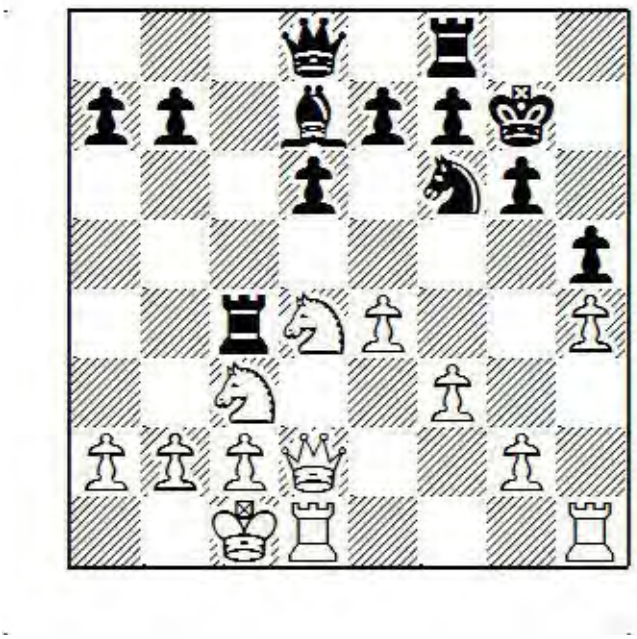
And we are back ...

However, 13 ... Bxh6 14 Qxh6 Nxb3+ 15 axb3 Qa5 16 Kb1 Rc5 seems completely playable for Black. However, this is of course not possible through our traditional move order 10 ... Ne5 11 0-0-0 Rc8 12 h4 h5 13 Bh6.

14 Bxc4 Rxc4

This variation picked up traction in the late 1980s after Black started having problems in the traditional main line 13 ... Bxh6 14.Qxh6 Rxc3 15.bxc3 Qc7. Mainly the game J.van der Wiel-Ki.Georgiev, Lugano 1987 demonstrated some serious issues for Black, which we will discuss in the next main game.

15 Bxg7 Kxg7



16 Nde2

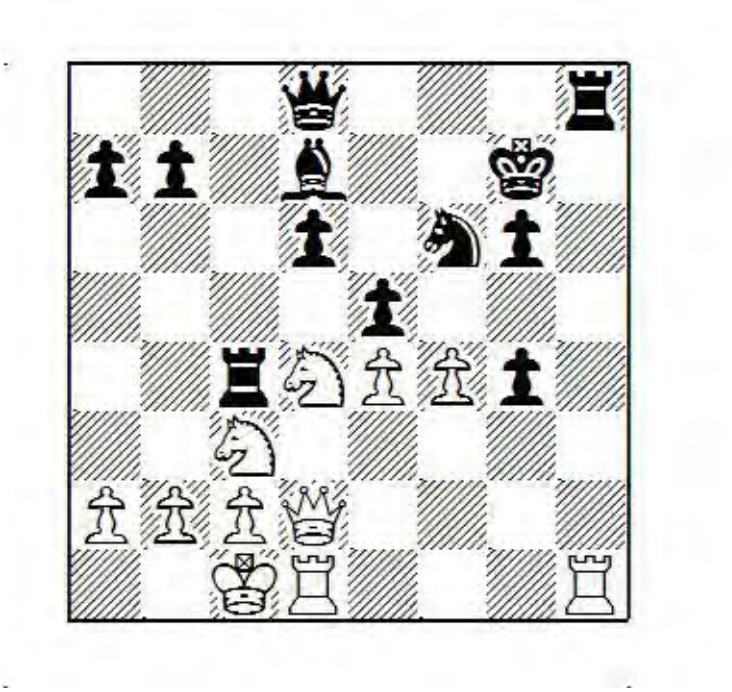
Question: What's this voluntary knight retreat all about?

Answer: White goes for a solid positional approach and shores up the c3-knight against an exchange sacrifice. In some lines, White can try a central squeeze with Ne2-f4 and plonk one knight on d5.

However, this isn't much of a threat to Black. White has tried a number of other continuations at this juncture:

a) 16 Kb1 Qa5 17 Rhe1 (or 17 Nb3 Qe5 18 Rhe1 Qg3 19 Qg5 Qxg5 20 hxg5 Nh7 21 Nd5 Re8 and Black has equalised and actually went on to beat his higher-rated opponent, Y.Solodovnichenko-C.Sochacki, Nancy 2014) 17 ... Rfc8 18 Qe3 a6 19 Re2 Qc5 20 Qd2 Qa5 21 Qd3 Qe5 22 Qe3 Qc5 (White could now continue shuffling the queen back and forth, settling for a draw, but the Russian grandmaster clearly was not happy with that) 23 Rdd2 b5 24 Nd1?! e5 and Black has taken over the initiative, I.Nepomniachtchi-Wei Yi, Tromso 2013.

b) The main line is White's sharpest choice, 16 g4 hxg4 17 h5 Rh8 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 f4 (or 19 fxg4!? e5?! (19 ... Nxg4 is better) 20 Rxh8 (preferable is 20 Nf3) 20 ... Qxh8 21 Nde2 Bxg4 22 Qxd6 Qe8 23 Rf1 Qe6 24 Qd3 and a draw was agreed in N.Malmdin-Y.Rantanen, Reykjavik 2011) and now Black should strike back with 19 ... e5!.



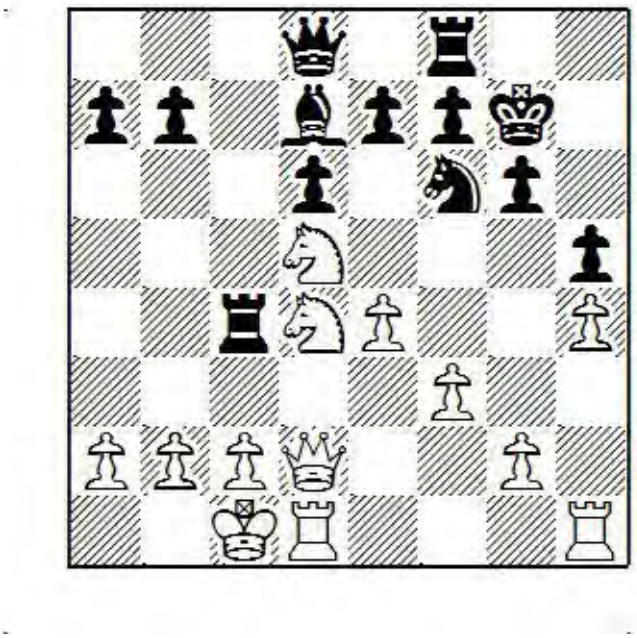
This radical move has been established as the best way to counter White's set-up. Now White has to choose between:

b1) 20 fxe5 dxe5 21 Nde2 Rh3 (an early outing in this line saw 21 ... Rc8 22 Qg5 Qe7 23 Ng3 Rxh1 24 Rxh1 Rh8 25 Rd1 Bc8 26 Nf5+ Bxf5 27 exf5 Qf7 28 fxg6 Qe6 and a draw was agreed in L.Yudasin-I.Smirin, Norilsk 1987, even though Black is doing very well at this point) 22 Qg5 Qe8 23 Rxh3 gxh3 24 Ng3 Nh7 25 Qe3 Bg4 26 Rf1 (the weaker 26 Rg1? was played in I.Gaponenko-N.Pogonina, Istanbul 2003 and Black is close to winning after 26 ... Qf8! 27 Nd5 Qc5 28 Qxc5 Rxc5 29 Ne3 Be6) 26 ... Qd8 27 Nd5 Qg5 28 Kb1 Rd4 29 Qc3 Rd1+ 30 Rxd1 Bxd1 with a very large advantage to Black, G.Sax-Ki.Georgiev, Elenite 1992 as the h-pawn is incredibly strong.

b2) 20 Rxh8 is also quite harmless and after 20 ... Qxh8 21 Nde2 Rc6 22 Kb1 (the alternatives are not exactly frightening for Black either as 22 Qe3 b6 23 Kb1 Qh3 24 Ng3 Nh5 25 Nxh5+ Qxh5 26 fxe5 Qxe5 27 Rd5 Qf6 or 22 fxe5 dxe5 23 Kb1 Qh2 24 Qe3 b6 25 Ng3 Qg2 26 Nce2 Re6 both give Black the edge) 22 ... Qh3 23 fxe5 dxe5 24 Qg5 Re6 with a decisive advantage for Black, V.Cantin Zaborras-D.Del Rey, Spain 1997.

b3) 20 Nde2 Rxh1 21 Rxh1 Nxe4 22 Nxe4 Rxe4 23 fxe5 Rxe2 24 Qxe2 (White ensured a draw with 24 Qh6+ Kf7 25 Qh7+ Ke6 26 Qxg6+ Kxe5 27 Rh5+ Kf4 28 Qxd6+ Kf3 29 Qd5+ Kf4, and despite playing on for a while, the game was eventually drawn anyway, G.Sax-P.Dely, Budapest 1971) 24 ... Qg5+ 25 Kb1 (or 25 Qd2 Qxd2+ 26 Kxd2 dxe5 27 Ke3 will most likely end in a draw) 25 ... Qxe5 26 Qd2 Bc6 27 Qh6+ Kf6 28 Rg1 Bf3 29 Qf8+ Ke6 and White should not be able to win, E.Inarkiev-Y.Yakovich, Vladivostok 2012.

c) 16 Nd5 encourages Black to exchange, leaving him with a passive bishop against a more active knight. White will attain a space advantage as a result. But Black need not be that accommodating.

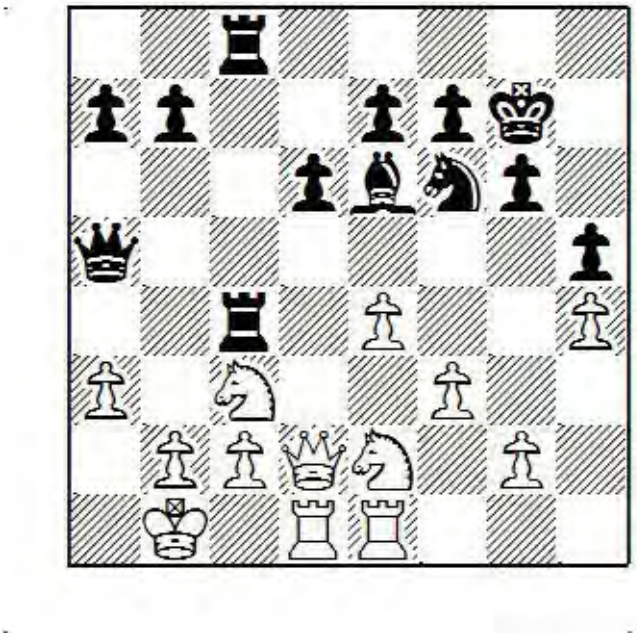


Once again, the key move is 16 ... e5! (claiming space, whereas 16 ... Nxd5 17 exd5 Qb6 18 Rhe1 Re8 19 Re4 Qa6 20 Kb1 Ra4 21 a3 gives White his ideal small but clear advantage position, G.Milos-D.Hausrath, Groningen 1996) 17 Nb3 (17 Ne2 Nxd5 18 Qxd5 was played in L.Yurtaev-S.Nadyrhanov, Bishkek 1993 and now 18 ... Rc6 19 Kb1 Be6 20 Qd2 Qb6 would have left Black with the better chances) 17 ... Nxd5 18 Qxd5 Rc6 19 Qa5 Qb8 20 Rd2 Be6 21 Kb1 Rfc8 22 Rhd1 Ra6 23 Qb5 Qc7 24 Qe2 Rc6 and Black has a comfortable position and should be better.

16 ... Qa5 17 Kb1 Rfc8 18 a3 Be6!?

Black can also play 18 ... b5!? immediately and after 19 Na2 Qb6 20 c3 a5, only Black can be better.

19 Rhe1

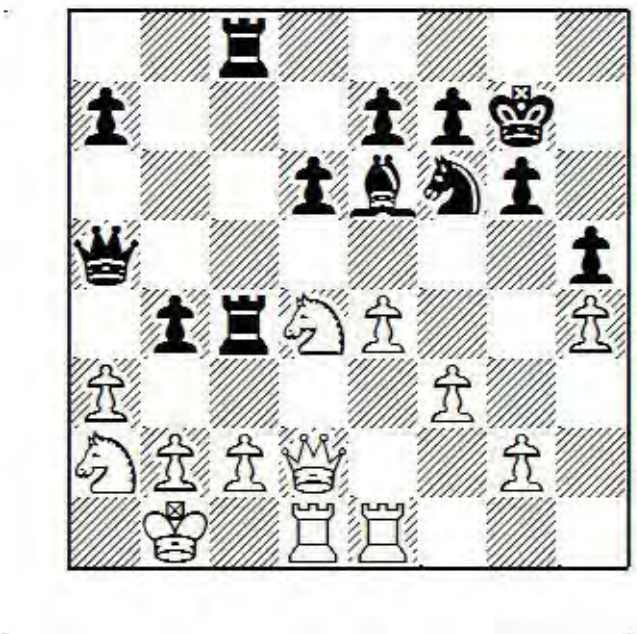


The white position is solid; the knights protect each other and prevent any kind of exchange sacrifices on c3. The pawn structure is intact and without any serious weaknesses. Black's position is more active, the pieces are well-coordinated but currently do not threaten anything. If Black wants to accomplish anything, he will have to push the queenside pawns forward and possibly redirect the knight to a more threatening square, possibly to c4 if possible.

19 ... b5

On the other hand, 19 ... Nd7 sends the knight in the direction of c4, via b6 or e5. But after 20 Na2 Qxd2 21 Rxd2 R4c5 22 b3, Black's knight will never reach the c4-square and White remains solid.

20 Nd4! b4! 21 Na2!



Black's b-pawn is pinned, so the b4-pawn will be temporarily lost but on account of another open file.

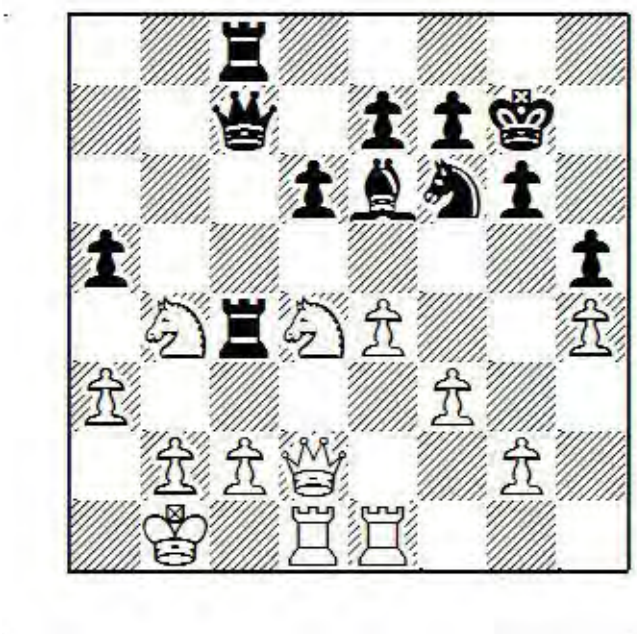
Exercise: How does Black best meet White's last move?

Answer: Use the time required to win the pawn to press on the c-file and in the process, win back the pawn.

21 ... Qc7! 22 Nxb4

Not 22 axb4 Rxd4! 23 Qxd4 Qxc2+ 24 Ka1 Qa4 with an enduring attack.

22 ... a5



Winning the pawn back right away.

23 Nd5

White hands back the pawn in the safest possible way.

The alternative do not look promising:

a) 23 Nxe6+ fxe6 24 Nd3 Rxc2 25 Qg5 e5 and Black's pieces are more active and more threatening

and their white counterparts.

b) However, 23 Na2?? loses on the spot. It's that spoiler move once again with 23 ... Rxd4! 24 Qxd4 Qxc2+ 25 Ka1 Qb3 and it is game over.

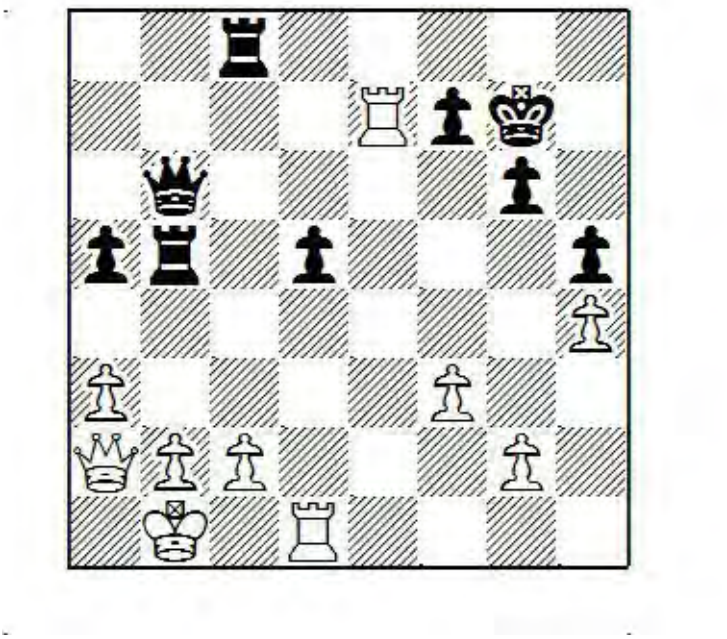
23 ... Bxd5 24 exd5 Nxd5!?

Black stirs the pot again to create some imbalances in attempt to win the game. The alternative is 24 ... Rc5!? to recapture the pawn with the rook. One line now runs 25 c4!? Rxc4 26 Qg5 (starting a counterattack) 26 ... Kf8 (avoiding the Nf5+ is crucial) 27 g4 Qc5 28 Nc6 Nxd5 29 Nxe7 Nxe7 30 Qxe7+ Kg8 31 Rxd6 Rc1+ 32 Rxc1 Qxc1+ 33 Ka2 Qc4+ 34 Kb1 Qc1+ with perpetual check.

25 Nb5 Qb6 26 Qxd5 R4c5 27 Qa2?!

This is an oddly passive move. Instead 27 Qd4+ seems to make more sense and after 27 ... e5 28 Qxd6 Qxb5 29 Rd2 R8c6 30 Qd3 Qxd3 31 cxd3 Rd6 32 Rc2 Rcd5, Black is a pawn down but should hold the draw without too many worries.

27 ... Rxb5 28 Rxe7 d5



White is a pawn up and Black's pawn structure is quite broken apart. However, White's pieces are completely uncoordinated. Therefore Black's activity and better placed pieces provide adequate compensation.

29 a4

Exercise: Without moving the pieces on the board, calculate whether 29 b3 Rc3 30 Qb2 d4 31 Ka1 Rd5 32 Qxc3 dxc3 33 Rxd5 can be played by White. The answer can be found after Black's next move.

29 ... Qf2!

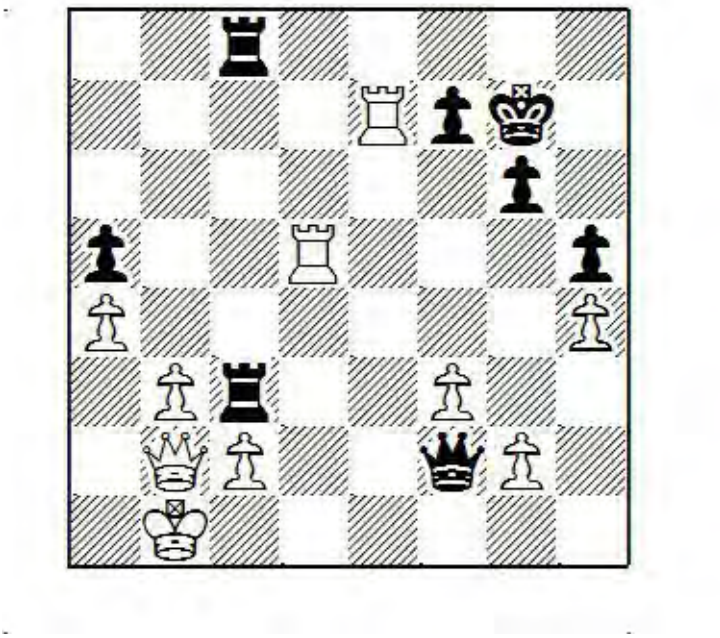
Answer: No, White loses on the spot after 33 ... Qg1+ 34 Ka2 Qc1.

30 b3

At least now the queen is seeing light at the end of the tunnel as the b2-square is available with a check.

30 ... Rbc5 31 Qb2+ Rc3 32 Rxd5

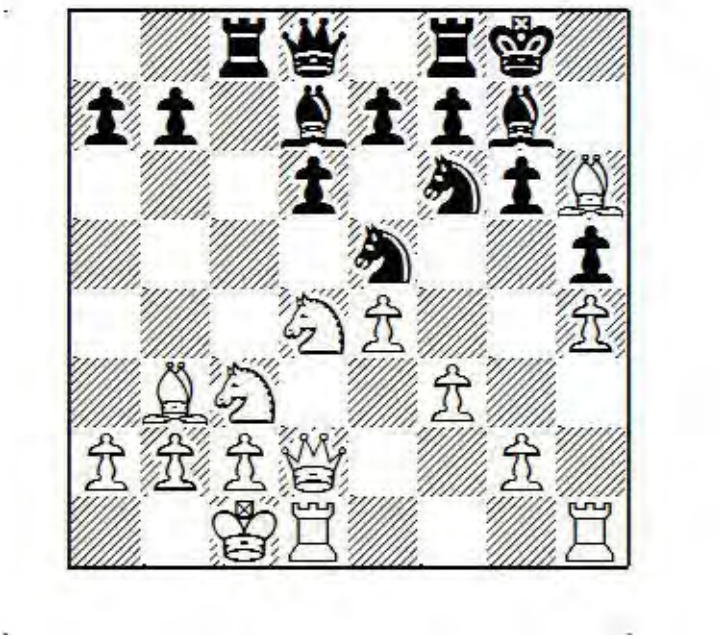
This initialises a forced sequence that ends with a draw. The alternative, 32 Re8 has the same outcome after 32 ... R8c7 33 Rxd5 Qxg2 34 Rxa5 Qxc2+ 35 Qxc2 Rxc2 36 Raa8 Rh2 and the threat of Black ending up with two rooks on White's second rank forces White to play something like 37 Rg8+ Kf6 38 Rac8 Rb7 39 Rb8 Rd7 40 Rbd8 Rc7 41 Rc8 with a repetition of moves.



32 ... Qxg2 33 Rxa5 Qf1+ 34 Ka2 Kf8 35 Raa7 Rxc2 36 Rxf7+ Ke8 37 Rae7+ Kd8 38 Rd7+ Ke8 39 Rde7+ Kd8 40 Rd7+ Ke8 ½-½

Game 49
D.Svetushkin-R.Milu
Bucharest 1999

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 Nc6 6 Nc3 g6 7 Be3 Bg7 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Ne5 11 Bb3 Rc8 12 h4 h5 13 Bh6



13 ... Bxh6 14 Qxh6

Question: This looks a bit scary with the queen on h6, on the inside of the pawn chain. Does Black not need to worry about this?

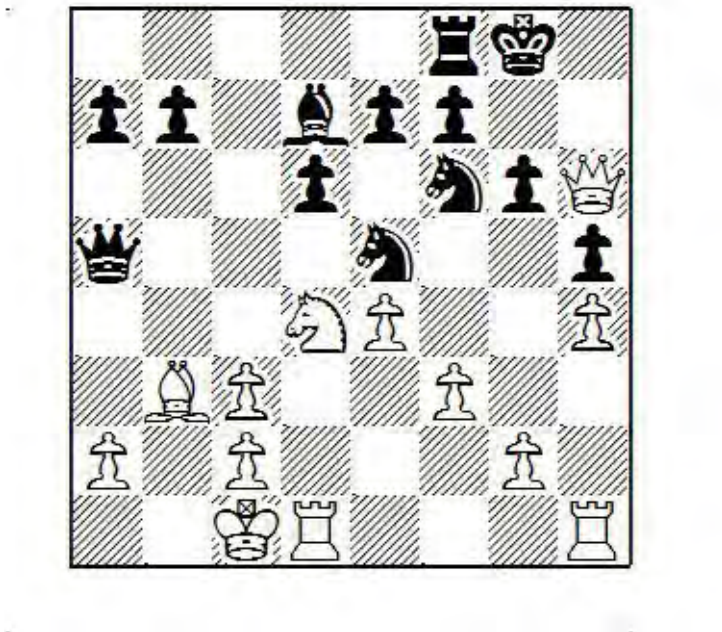
Answer: Take care, yes. Worry, not so much. It is a calculated risk to invite the queen to h6, away from the queenside, where Black obviously is planning to do some damage.

14 ... Rxc3

Question: Is it safe to assume that this was the plan behind the exchange on h6?

Answer: Absolutely, by drawing the queen away from the queenside, Black has the opportunity to attack White's king without the interference of White's queen. This is a theme that you will see repeated across many different lines in the Dragon variation.

15 bxc3 Qa5



In Game 50, we will cover 15 ... Qc8 and 15 ... Qc7.

16 Kb1

Question: With everything apparently being a race to hit the opponent's king first, what's the deal with this slow move?

Answer: If Black takes on c3 or checks on a3, White will have to move the king anyway, but it will not be a forced move. Since capturing on c3 right now is considered bad for Black, he will then have to think of something else to do. So in a sense White is claiming to gain time with this move.

White's alternatives at this juncture are not overwhelmingly interesting or critical:

a) 16 f4 Qxc3 17 Kb1 Nc4 18 Bxc4 Qxc4 19 f5 Rc8 20 fxg6 Be6 21 Nxe6 Qxc2+ 22 Ka1 Qc3+ 23 Kb1 fxe6 24 Rc1 Qb4+ with a draw by perpetual check, R.Milu-D.Feletar, Medulin 2002.

b) 16 g4 Qxc3 17 Kb1 Nc4 (17 ... a5!? transposes to what we will cover in Game 50) 18 Bxc4 Qxc4 19 gxh5 Rc8 20 hxg6 e5 21 Nb3 (White could have tried 21 g7 Nh7 22 Qxd6 exd4 23 Qxd4 Qxc2+ 24 Ka1 with better chances for White) 21 ... Qxc2+ 22 Ka1 Qc3+ 23 Kb1 Qc2+ 24 Ka1 Qc3+ with a draw by perpetual check, L.Voloshin-J.Zezulkin, Mysliborz 2008.

c) 16 Kb2 Rc8 17 Qd2 Qb6 18 Ka1 a5 19 a3?! (19 a4 Qc5) 19 ... Qc5 20 Kb2 was played in B.Spassky-A.Mestel, London 1982, and here Black can grab the initiative with 20 ... d5 21 exd5 Nxd5 and I would rather not play White.

16 ... Rc8

Question: Hang on ... what's wrong with 16 ... Qxc3?

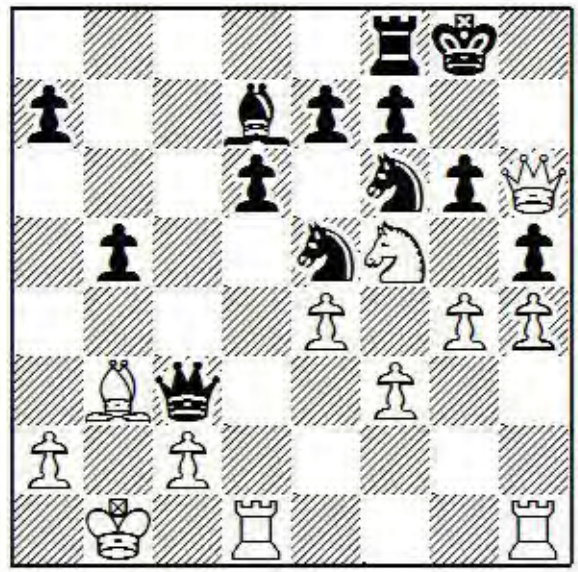
Answer: As mentioned above, capturing the pawn is not a good option for Black at this juncture. As the move doesn't come with a tempo, White gets to regroup with 16 ... Qxc3 17 Ne2 Qc5 18 Nf4 e6 19 Nd3 Nxd3 20 Rxd3 Rc8 21 Qg5 and is comfortably better.

The main alternative here is 16 ... b5 17 g4 (17 Ne2 Qa3 18 Nf4 Nc4 19.Nd3 Rc8! 20 g4 Qa5 21 Nb4 Qa3 22 Nd3 Qa5 is a draw by repetition) 17 ... Qxc3 and now we have:

a) 18 gxh5 Nxh5 (or 18 ... Nc4 19 Qc1! Nxh5 20 Rd3 Qb4 21 Qh6 Rb8 22 Ka1 Qc5 23 Rg1 Qe5 24 Rg5 Qf4?! 25 Rd1 Qe3?? 26 Rxg6+ fxg6 was J.Magem Badals-A.Romero Holmes, Monzon 1987, and Black resigned due to 27 Qxe3) 19 Qd2 (or 19 Rhg1 Nc4 20 Qc1 e5 21 Rd3 Qb4 22 Qh6 Nf4 23 h5 and now 23 ... Nxd3 24 Rxg6+ leads to a draw by perpetual check) 19 ... Qxd2 20 Rxd2 Nf4 21 Rdh2 (or 21

Kb2 a5 22 a3 Kg7 23 Rg1 Rh8 24 Rh2 Kf6 25 Rg3 Nh5 26 Rg1 which was evaluated as better for White in *Chessbase Magazine* by Schulz, but 26 ... Nf4 looks absolutely fine for Black) 21 ... Rc8 22 Rg1 Kg7 23 Kb2 as seen in M.Apicella-A.Payen, Biel 1992 and now 23 ... Kh6 leaves us with a position that can only be better for Black.

b) 18 Nf5



White jettisons a knight to prise open the g-file. Now, accuracy is required from Black to navigate safely.

Exercise: Evaluate which move is better: 18 ... gxf5 or 18 ... Bxf5.

b1) 18 ... Bxf5?! 19 exf5 (19 gxf5 Nc4 20 Qc1 Qxf3 is fine for Black) 19 ... Nc4 20 Qc1 (20 Bxc4? bxc4 21 fxg6 Qa3 and White can resign) 20 ... Qxf3 21 fxg6 hxg4 22 Rd3 (22 gxf7+ Kxf7 23 Rhf1 Qh3 24 Qh6 Qc3 25 Bxc4+ bxc4 26 Qh7+ Ke8 and Black has at least a draw in hand according to M.Johnson) 22 ... Qf5 23 Re1 (23 gxf7+ Rxf7 24 Re1 Ne4 with an obvious advantage for Black) 23 ... Qxg6 24 Rxe7 Ne4 25 Qg1 as in V.Kotronias-D.Anagnostopoulos, Karditsa 1996 and now 25 ... Ned2+ 26 Kc1 Nf3 27 Qg3 Nce5 is simply better, if not winning for Black.

Answer: Although it looks counter-intuitive to expose the king on the g-file, the capture with the g-pawn is stronger.

b2) 18 ... gxf5! is the correct way to deal with the knight sacrifice and now:

b21) 19 gxf5 Qxf3 20 Rhg1+ Neg4 21 Qg6+ Kh8 22 Bxf7 Qxe4 (A.Schulz) and it is curtains for White.

b22) 19 g5 Qe3! 20 Rhg1 Ne8 21 f4! Qxf4 22 Rdf1 Qe3 23 Re1 Qxe1+ 24 Rxe1 Ng4! 25 Qg6+ Ng7 26 Rg1 e6 27 Qf6! Nxf6 28 gxf6 fxe4 29 Rxg7+ Kh8 and Black is clearly better in the endgame.

b23) 19 gxh5 Qxf3 20 Rhg1+ Neg4 21 Qg5+ Kh8 22 exf5 Rg8 23 Qc1 d5 and Black is winning.

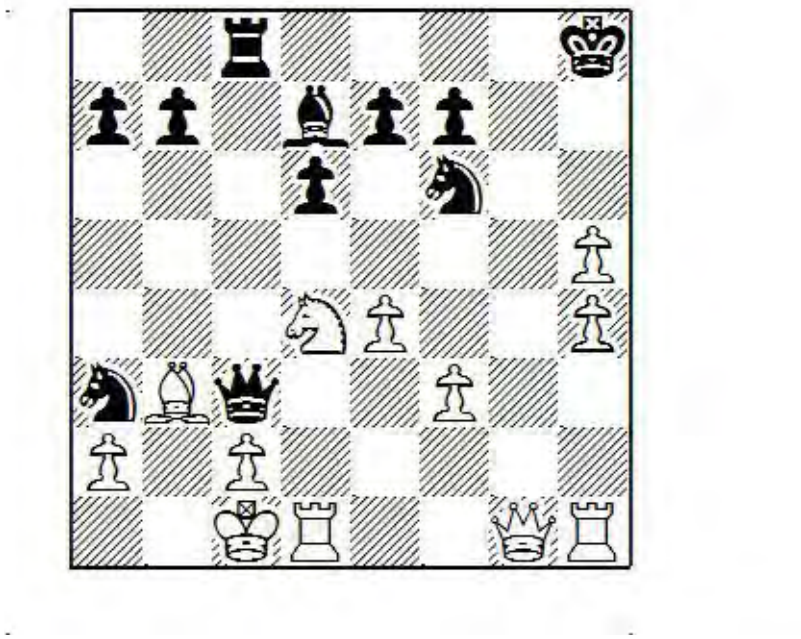
17 g4 Nc4

Black can also play 17 ... Qxc3 which can be arrived at from 15 ... Qc7 16 Kb1 Rc8 17 g4 Qxc3 as well. Now 18 gxh5 (or 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 exf5 hxg4 20 fxg6 Nc4 21 gxf7+ Kxf7 22 Qc1 as played in D.Bokan-A.Fedorov, Moscow 1992, and here 22 ... gxf3 23 Rd3 Qe5 24 Rxf3 Ke8 gives Black excellent compensation for the exchange) 18 ... Nc4 19 Qc1 Nxh5 20 Rd3 Qb4 21 Rg1 a5 22 Ka1 a4 23 Bxc4 Qxc4 24 Qh6 Rc5 25 Rg5 and when Black now plays 25 ... e5 to avoid the exchange of rooks as well as kick the knight away from d4, White can force a draw with 26 Rxh5 gxh5 27 Qg5+ Kf8 28 Qh6+ Kg8 29 Qg5+ Kf8 30 Qd8+ Kg7 31 Qg5+ as in F.Hellers-W.Watson, Herning 1991.

18 Rd3

White has tried a few other ideas at this point:

a) 18 gxh5 looks like the natural continuation, but it is in fact a bad idea as 18 ... Na3+ 19 Kc1 (or 19 Kb2 Qxc3+ 20 Kxa3 Rc4! and since White can only delay getting mated, he resigned in J.Cueto Chajtur-M.Vasilev, Collado Villalba 2003) 19 ... Qxc3, and now after the tempting 20 Qxg6+ (20 hxg6 Nc4 21 Bxc4 Rxc4 22 Kb1 Rxd4 23 Rxd4 Qxd4 24 gxf7+ Kxf7 and Black is winning, N.Burnoiu-R.Milu, Miercurea Ciuc 1998) 20 ... Kh8 21 Qg1, we arrive at the following position:



Exercise (Tactical): Here, Black played 21 ... Bb5 and a draw was agreed between R.Tischbierek-G.Pirisi, Eger 1987, on the account of Black being able to deliver perpetual check via ... Qa1+ and ... Qc3+. Can you find a much stronger move for Black?

Answer: The problem for White is that his knight cannot leave the d4-square as ... Qxc2+ leads to mate. Hence, the solution lies in hitting the knight with an audacious rook offer.

21 ... Rc4! (Black is winning as the rook cannot be taken due to 22 Bxc4 Nxc4 and it's either mate on a1 or b2) 22 Qe1 Qa1+ 23 Kd2 Qxd4+ 24 Ke2 Qe5 and White is lost.

b) 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 gxh5 Qxc3 (19 ... Qxh5 20 Qxh5 Nxh5 21 Ne2 Bb5 22 Rhe1 Rc7 23 Nd4 Bc4 24 e5 dxe5 25 Rxe5 and despite his ugly pawns, White has the better chances in the endgame, L.Hazai-S.Farago, Hungary 1989) 20 Rd3 Qb4+ (or 20 ... Qa5 21 Nb3 Qxh5 22 Qxh5 Nxh5 23 Kb2 Rb4 24 Rd4 Rb6 25 Kc3 Nf4 26 Rh2 Bb5 27 Kd2 Ba6 and Black should not have any significant problems, M.Susnik-N.Fercec, Bled 2000) 21 Nb3 (21 Rb3 Qc5 22 Ne2 Nxh5 23 Rxb7 Rb4+ 24 Rxb4 Qxb4+ 25 Ka1 Bb5 26 Rb1 Qc4 27 Nc1 Qc3+ 28 Rb2 a6 and White is marginally better, A.Kovacevic-N.Ristic, Vrnjacka Banja 2005) 21 ... Nxh5 22 Rg1 (22 Rd5 leads to a forced draw after 22 ... Qc3 23 Rxh5 Qxc2+ 24 Ka1 Qc3+ 25 Kb1 Qd3+ 26 Ka1, J.Gallagher-A.Mestel, Swansea 1987) 22 ... Qb6 23 Rg2 Bh3 24 Rgd2 Be6 25 Qe3 Qxe3 26 Rxe3 Kg7 27 Rd4 and White has the slightly better chances in the endgame, R.Mainka-J.Koch, Dortmund 1989.

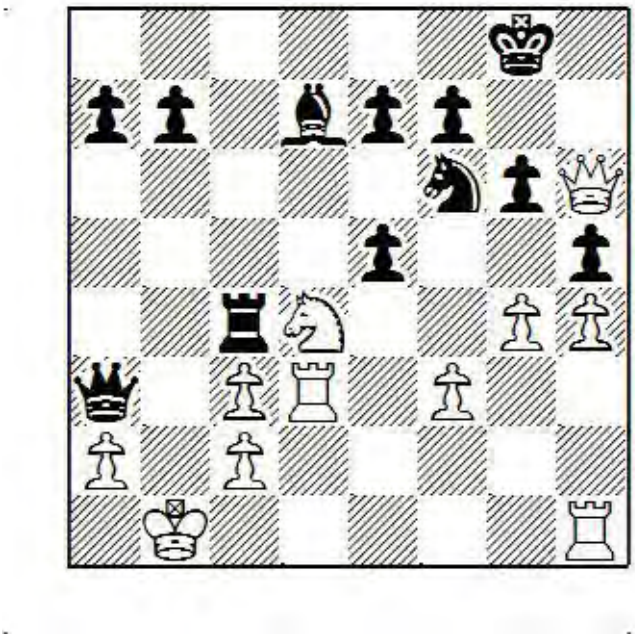
18 ... b5

Other tries favour White:

a) 18 ... hxg4 19 h5 g5 20 Nf5!? Bxf5 21 Qxg5+! Bg6 22 Qxa5 Nxa5 23 hxg6 Nxb3, Y.Kruppa-J.Gheng, Berlin 1994 and now 24 gxf7+ Kxf7 25 cxb3 gxf3 26 Rxf3 would leave White with realistic expectations of winning the game.

b) 18 ... Rc5?? is a bad blunder that was played twice by the same player, walking into 19 Nf5! Bxf5 20 gxf5 Qa3 21 Bxc4 Rxc4 22 e5 and Black resigned in A.Volzhin-E.Kahn, Budapest 1995. He proceeded on in B.Szuk-E.Kahn, Budapest 1995 with 22 ... Rc6 23 c4 Rb6+ 24 Rb3 dxe5 25 Rd1 Rxb3+ 26 axb3 Qa5 27 fxg6 fxg6 28 Qxg6+ Kf8 29 Qf5 Qc5 30 f4 Qf2 31 Qg6 and resigned anyway.

c) 18 ... Qa3?? is equally bad as 18 ... Rc5. After 19 Bxc4 Rxc4 20 e5 dxe5, M.Borgstaedt-C.Pantaleoni, Lugano 1989, White did not find the killer blow here but managed to win anyway later.



Question: Can you find the way to seal the deal here?

Answer: White strips away the defence with 21 Ne6! fxe6 22 Qxg6+ Kf8 23 Qh6+ Kf7 24 g5 Rc6 25 c4 Rb6+ 26 Rb3 Qc5 27 gxf6 exf6 28 Qh7+ Ke8 29 Rd1 with a completely winning position.

19 Nf5

White can consider 19 gxh5 Qa3 20 Qc1 Qxc1+ 21 Kxc1 Nxh5 22 Bxc4 Rxc4 23 Ne2 which is a bit better for him.

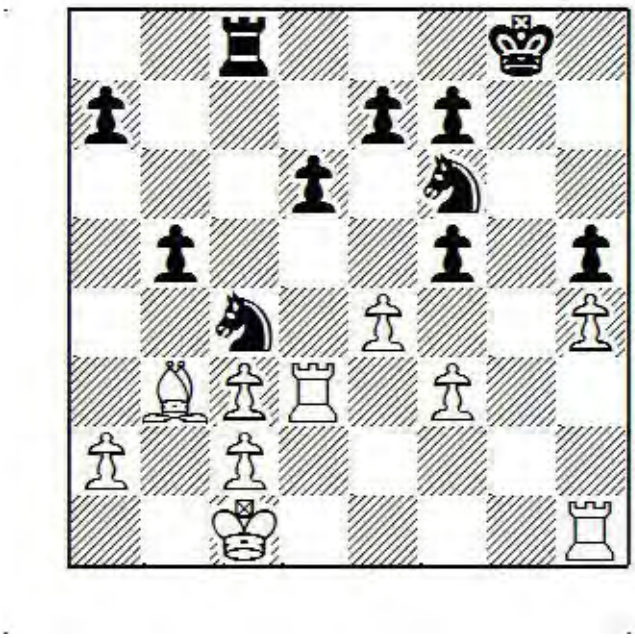
19 ... Bxf5

Or 19 ... gxf5 20 gxf5 Qa3 21 Rg1+ Ng4 22 Qc1 Qxc1+ 23 Kxc1 Nce5 24 Kd2 Kf8 25 fxg4 hxg4 and Black cannot be worse.

20 gxf5 Qa3

Forcing the retreat of White's queen.

21 Qc1 Qxc1+ 22 Kxc1 gxf5



23 exf5

Question: Considering how bad this bishop is and how potentially strong this knight can be, would it not make sense for White to exchange on c4?

Answer: That may actually not be such a bad idea, for instance 23 Bxc4 Rxc4 24 exf5 Kf8, and we have a different type of ending on the board. Nevertheless, I feel that only Black really can be better here as well. I suppose that Svetushkin felt that he needed the bishop on the board if he ever was to make a serious claim for an advantage.

23 ... Ne5 24 Re3 Kf8 25 Rg1 Rc5 26 Kd2 Nc6

Black can also consider 26 ... a5! and after 27 a4 (27 a3 a4 28 Ba2 Nd5 29 Rxe5 dxe5 30 Bxd5 Rxd5+ saddles White in a rook ending with some seriously ugly pawns) 27 ... bxa4 28 Ba2 Nd5 29 Bxd5 Rxd5+, only Black can really think about being better.

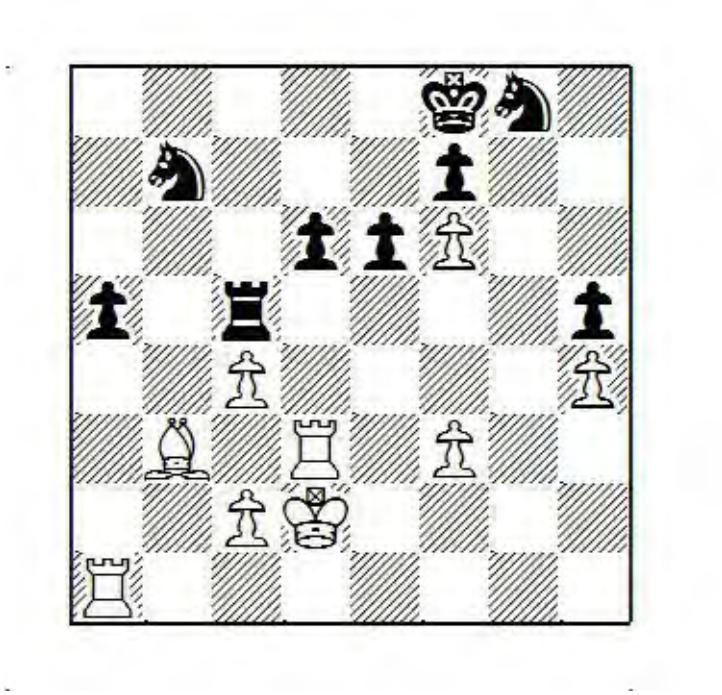
27 a4 bxa4 28 Bxa4 Na5?!

Black forces the bishop back to the b3-square but I rather prefer 28 ... Nd5 29 Re4 Ne5, although one possible conclusion is an immediate draw after 30 Rg3 Nc4+ 31 Kd3 Nb2+ 32 Kd2 Nc4+. However, it is not entirely unlikely that Black is playing for a win.

29 Bb3 Rb5 30 Rge1 Ng8 31 f6! e6! 32 c4?!

I'm not sure about this move which effectively makes the bishop a tall pawn and instead, 32 Rd3 looks like an obvious and good alternative.

32 ... Rc5 33 Rd3 Nb7 34 Ra1 a5



35 Rb1

35 Ba4!? may be White's best shot at winning the game. For instance, 35 ... Nxf6 36 Rb3 Rc7 37 Rb6 Nc5 38 Bb5 Ra7 39 Rd1 Ke7 40 Ke2 has Black facing emerging problems.

35 ... Nxf6 36 Ba2 Rc7 37 Rb5 Ke7?!

Black has a safe and good alternative in 37 ... a4 38 Kc1 Ke7 which looks very comfortable for him.

38 Rdb3

My computer claims a substantial advantage for White after 38 Ra3, but it really cannot find an intelligent way to follow up on this after 38 ... Kf8 39 Kc1 Kg7 40 Rg5+ Kf8 41 Kd1 Ke7.

38 ... Nc5 39 Rxa5!?

An interesting decision, White offers to return the exchange if Black will only allow him to straighten out the doubled c-pawns and allow the bishop back into the game.

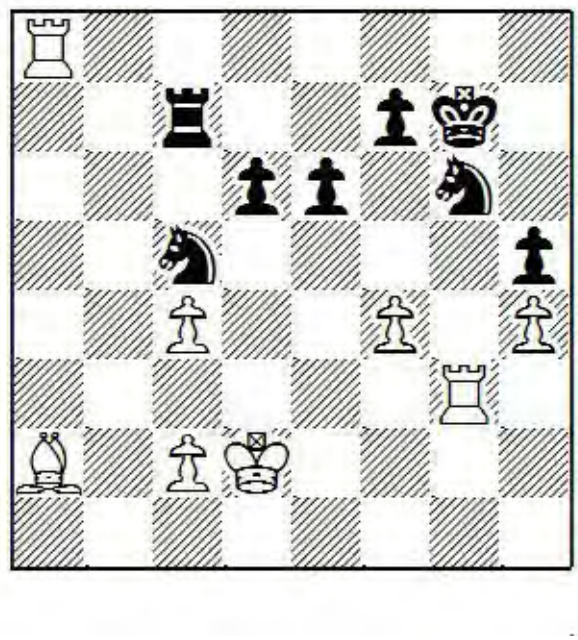
39 ... Nfd7!

While my computer likes the idea of 39 ... Nxb3+ 40 cxb3 d5, I applaud Black for staying firm and not get tempted to restore material equality.

40 Re3 Kf6

After winning the pawn on a5, White is a full exchange up, but with the presence of White's terrible a2-bishop and very ugly pawns, Black should be fine.

41 Ra8 Ke7 42 Ra5 Kf6 43 Ra8 Kg7 44 f4 Nf8 45 Rd8 Nb7 46 Ra8 Nc5 47 Rg3+ Ng6



The database score of the game says the game concluded in the following fashion 48 Kc3?? Kf6?? 49 Rg5? Nxh4? 50 Rxh5 Nf5 51 Kd2 Ne4+ 52 Kd3, but I suspect that Black would not have missed the decisive ... Ne4 checks on move 48 and 49. Thus the game is likely to end in the following manner.

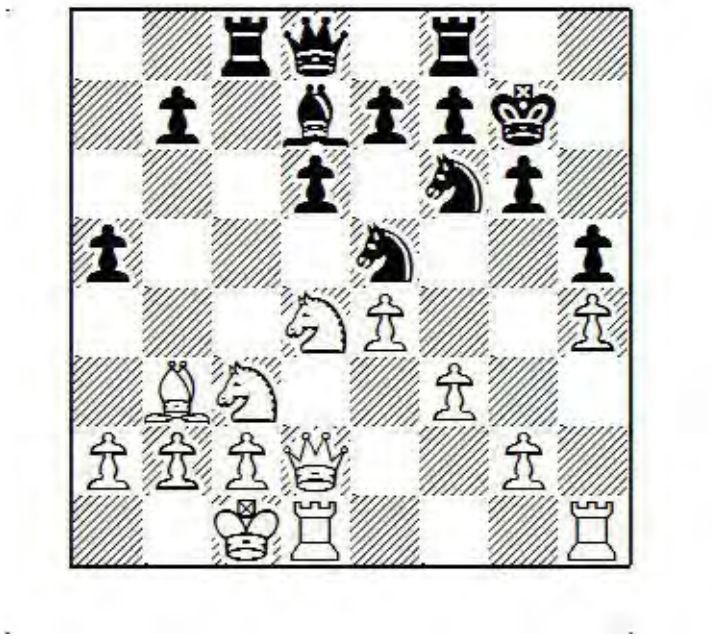
48 Ke3 Kf6 49 Rg5 Nxh4 50 Rxh5 Nf5+ 51 Kd2 Ne4+ 52 Kd3 ½-½

With a repetition of moves coming up, the players agreed to a draw.

Game 50
O.Renet-S.Kudrin
St Martin 1991

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 h4 h5 11 0-0-0 Ne5 12 Bb3 Rc8 13 Bh6 Bxh6

Another interesting minor line is 13 ... a5. While not being officially the first to play the line, Boris Alterman brought it to the attention of people when he played it and covered it in *Chess Informant*. Now let's have a look at the position after 14 Bxg7 Kxg7.



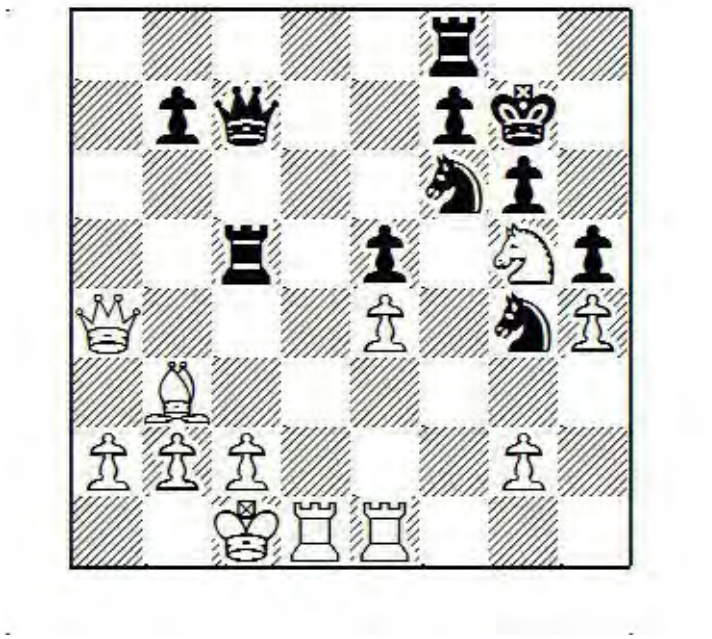
Question: Would it not have made more sense to have forced the queen to h6, by exchanging there before playing ... a7-a5?

Answer: In most cases, you would certainly be right, but the idea behind this line for Black is to have the white queen remain on the d2-square.

Now White has to choose between:

a) 15 g4 a4! (this is one of the ideas behind 13 ... a5, whereas 15 ... Rc5? makes very little sense and after 16 g5 Ng8 17 f4 Ng4 18 a4 Qe8 19 Rhf1 Qc8 20 Kb1 Rd8 21 Nd5, Black is about to get crushed, K.Abhishek-S.Khukhashvili, Dubai 2010) 16 Nxa4 (16 Bxa4 Nc4 17 Qd3 Bxa4 18 Nxa4 Qa5! and Black is already in charge of the game following 19 Nc3 Qb4 20 Nb3 Ne5 and only Black can better) 16 ... Bxa4 (better is 16 ... hxg4 17 h5 Nxh5 18 Qe3 gxf3 19 Nxf3 Nxf3 20 Qxf3 Nf6 and I prefer Black, although the chances are probably about even) 17 Bxa4 Nc4 18 Qe2 e5 19 Bb3 Na5 20 Nb5 Nxb3+ 21 axb3 and White is already clearly better, D.Jakovenko-S.Farago, Budapest 1995.

b) 15 f4 Neg4 (or 15 ... a4 16 fxe5 dxe5 17 Bxa4 exd4 18 Qxd4 Bxa4 19 Qxa4 Qc7 20 Qb4, and Black has some (but not full) compensation for the pawn) 16 Rhe1 Rc5 (16 ... e5 17 Nf3 Bc6 18 Ng5 Qe7 19 g3 Rcd8 and White has a comfortable game) 17 Nf3 Qc7 18 Qd4 a4 19 Nxa4 Bxa4 20 Qxa4 e5 21 fxe5 dxe5 22 Ng5, C.Pfrommer-S.Reschke, Germany 1990.



Steve Mayer claims some compensation for the pawn for Black and also the game was later drawn. However, I remain unconvinced about Black's chances here.

c) 15 a4 Rc5 (15 ... Qb6 16 Rhe1 Nc4 17 Qe2 Qb4 18 Ndb5 Bxb5 19 Nxb5 Nb6 (19 ... Nd2!? 20 Rxd2 Qxb3 21 Kb1 Qc4 22 Qxc4 Rxc4 23 b3 Rc5 24 Kb2 and White has at best an insignificant

advantage) 20 Kb1 Qc5 21 Rd4, and White definitely has the more comfortable game, J.Egger Mancilla-G.Vescovi, Rancagua 1993) 16 Ndb5 (16 g4 hxg4 17 f4 Nc6 18 Nxc6 Bxc6 19 Rhe1 e5 20 Nd5 Bxd5 21 Bxd5 Nxd5 22 exd5 f6 23 Re4 Qc8, and Black has a large advantage, J.Egger Mancilla-B.Alterman, Santiago de Chile 1990 – this is the game that brought the attention on to this variation for a while) 16 ... Qb6 17 f4 Neg4 18 Rhe1 Rfc8 19 Kb1 Be6 20 Qd4 Bxb3 21 cxb3 with the better game for White. There are not many active ideas for Black, so basically he will have to defend patiently, Y.Gruenfeld-B.Alterman, Israel 1993.

14 Qxh6 Rxc3

Black has also tried 14 ... a5!? at this juncture to 'move order' White, trying to confuse the situation a little, but it is largely without effect. For starters, White can prevent the exchange sacrifice with 15 Qd2!? (15 a4 Rxc3 16 bxc3 Qc7 17 Kb1 b5 18 axb5 a4 19 Ba2 Rb8 20 Qd2 Bxb5 21 Ka1 Bc4 is a complicated battle where the chances are approximately even, J.Friedel-S.Kudrin, Tulsa 2008) 15 ... b5?! (15 ... Qb6 is an improved version of the 13 ... a5 lines we looked at above and after 16 a4 Qb4 17 Kb1 Kg7 18 Rhe1 Nc4, chances are about even) 16 Ncxb5 a4 17 Bxa4 Qb6 18 b3 Qc5 19 Rhe1 Ra8 20 Qc3 and I doubt Black has full compensation for the two sacrificed pawns, A.Khalifman-L.Riemersma, Dordrecht 1988.

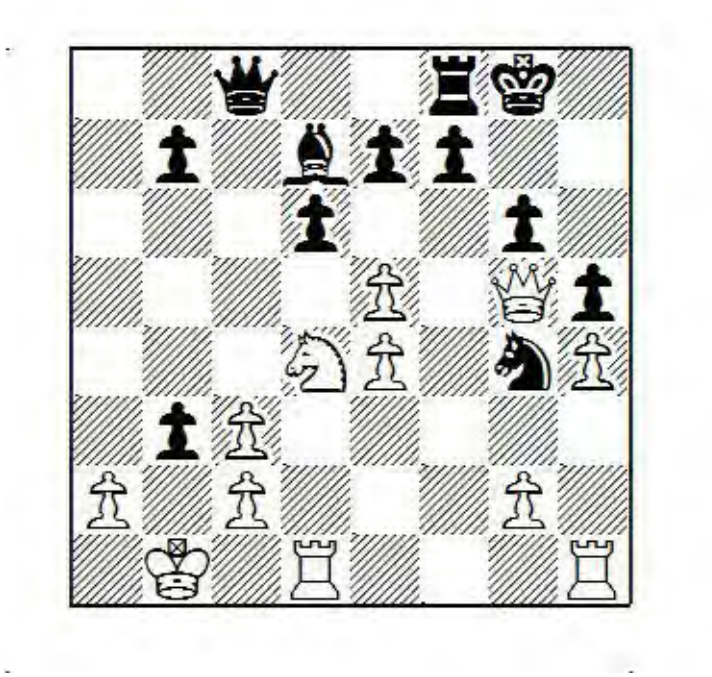
15 bxc3 Qc7

A key alternative for Black is 15 ... Qc8 which is also the latest development in this line. However, it is still rather limited the exposure the line has had. There are some transpositional options with our main game, usually depending on when Black plays ... Qxc3. Now White has tried:

a) 16 Qe3 a5 17 a4 Qc5 18 Kb1 Rc8 19 Rhe1 Nc4 20 Qg5 Qa3 21 Qc1 Qc5 22 Qg5 Qa3 23 Qc1 and a draw was agreed in A.Rizouk-H.Asis Gargatagli, Lorca 2004.

b) 16 g4 hxg4 17 f4 (17 h5! Qxc3 18 Kb1 g5! 19 Qxg5+ Kh7 20 Nf5 Bxf5 21 Qxf5+ Kh8 22 fxg4 b5 with an interesting position where Black's chances should not be worse) 17 ... Qxc3 18 Kb1 Nc4 19 Bxc4 Qxc4 20 h5 and now Black blundered with 20 ... Qb4+?? (instead 20 ... Be6 21 Nxe6 Qb4+ 22 Kc1 Qa3+ is a draw by perpetual check) 21 Nb3 Be8 22 e5 and resigned, Y.Gonzalez Vidal-H.Delgado Ramos, Sabadell 2011.

c) 16 Kb1!? a5 17 f4 Nfg4 18 Qg5 a4 19 fxe5 axb3. Now we have the typical recapturing issue:



Question: Which way should White recapture?

Answer: In this case, capturing towards the centre makes more sense. The king is safer and the c-pawn does guard the d3-square which comes in handy in some lines.

c1) 20 axb3!? Nf2 (20 ... Qxc3 is met with 21 Rd3! Qa5 22 e6! and White goes into a better ending) 21 Kb2 Nxh1 22 Rxh1 Qc5 23 exd6 Qxg5 24 hxg5 exd6 is slightly better for White.

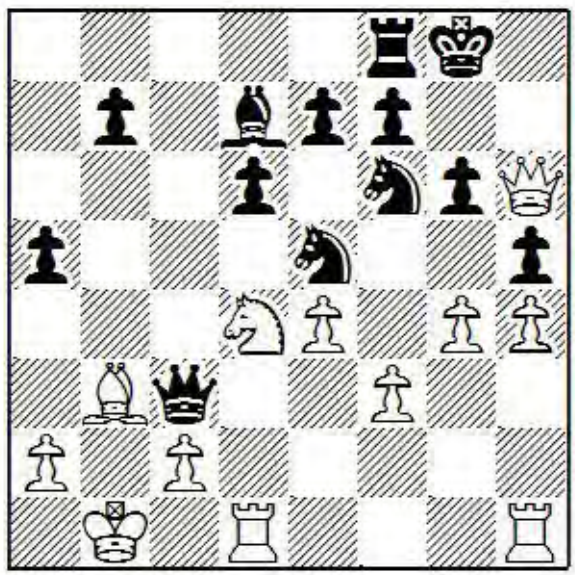
c2) 20 cxb3?! Nf2 (not 20 ... Qxc3?? as 21 e6! wins outright) 21 Qxe7 Nxe4 22 Rhf1 Nxc3+ 23 Kb2 Nxd1+ 24 Rxd1 dxe5 25 Qxe5 Bg4 and Black is doing rather well, H.Stefansson-M.Petursson, Iceland 1995.

d) 16 Ne2 a5 17 f4 Nfg4 18 Qg5 a4 19 fxe5 axb3 20 cxb3 (20 axb3 Nf2 21 exd6 exd6 22 Qf6 Nxh1 23 Rxh1 Bc6 gives even chances) 20 ... Bb5 21 Qd2 Bxe2 22 Qxe2 Qxc3+ 23 Kb1 Qxe5 24 Rd5 and a draw was agreed in T.Wedberg-J.Nesterov, New York 1992.

16 Kb1

White has three alternatives to consider:

a) The sharp 16 g4!? looks dangerous but it has been established a long time ago that Black is fine after 16 ... Qxc3 17 Kb1 a5.



This complex position has seen:

a1) 18 gxh5 a4 19 hxg6 (19 Ne2? Qxf3 20 hxg6 axb3 21 g7 bxc2+ 22 Ka1 cxd1Q+ 23 Rxd1 Ng6 24 gxf8Q+ Nxf8 and Black is winning, G.Gopal-P.Carlsson, Goa 2002) 19 ... axb3 20 cxb3 (or 20 gxf7+ Kxf7 21 cxb3 Nxf3 22 Nf5 Rg8, and the party is over for White, M.Huba-I.Gazik, Hlohovec 1998) and 20 ... fxg6 21 h5 Nxh5 22 f4? (White can draw with 22 Rxh5 gxh5 23 Rg1+ Bg4 24 Ne6 Qd3+ 25 Kb2 Rf7 26 Rxg4+ hxg4 27 Qg5+ and it's perpetual check) 22 ... Nd3 23 Qxg6+ Ng7 24 Qh7+ Kf7 25 Rh2 Rc8 and White is completely lost, D.Durham-S.Kudrin, Las Vegas 1989.

a2) 18 a4? b5! 19 axb5 a4 forces White to play 20 Qd2 Qxd2 21 Rxd2 axb3 22 g5 Nxf3! 23 Nxf3 Nxe4 24 Rd4 bxc2+ 25 Kxc2 Rc8+ 26 Kb2 Nc5 and Black is clearly better.

a3) 18 a3 a4 19 Ba2 was Qi Jingxuan-A.Miles, Bled 1979, and now Black would have done best to play 19 ... Qxa3 20 gxh5 Qb4+ 21 Ka1 Qc3+ 22 Kb1 Nxh5 with a very obvious advantage.

b) 16 Qe3 is playable, but can hardly be described as critical. Black obtains an excellent game after 16 ... Rc8 (16 ... a5 17 a4 Qc5 is an attractive alternative) 17 Kd2 a5 18 a3 Qc5 19 Ra1 d5 20 exd5 Nc4+ 21 Bxc4 Qxc4 22 Qd3 Qxd5 with excellent compensation for the exchange, J.Kosturkiewicz-A.Zaskalski, Wysowa 2003.

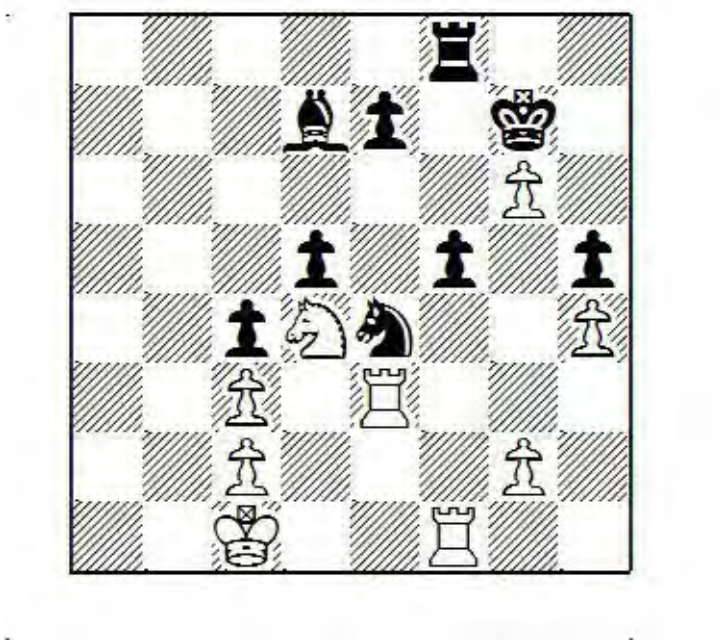
c) Also, 16 Ne2 is hardly a bother for Black as after 16 ... Bb5 17 Qe3 Rc8 18 Kb1 a5 19 a4 Nc4 20 Qh6 Ba6 21 Nd4 Qc5 22 Rhe1 Na3+ 23 Ka2 Nc4 24 Kb1 Na3+ 25 Ka2 Nc4, a draw was agreed in P.Popovic-A.Mestel, Hastings 1980.

16 ... Rc8

This is one of several continuations at this juncture. Some of the more important alternatives are the following:

a) 16 ... b5 17 f4 Nc4 18 f5 Qa5 19 Rd3 (not 19 Bxc4? bxc4 20 Ne2 gxf5 and Black is winning) 19 ... Qa3 20 Qc1 Qxc1+ 21 Kxc1 Nxe4 22 Rf1 (Here White should definitely deviate with 22 fxg6 f5 23 Nf3 Kg7 24 Bxc4 bxc4 25 Rd4 Be6 26 Ng5 Nxg5 27 hxg5 Kxg6, which is evaluated as better for White by

Houdini, but I can only see myself wanting to play Black in this position!) 22 ... Kg7 23 a4?! (23 Bxc4 bxc4 24 Re3 d5 25 fxg6 f5 has been suggested as an improvement, but it still looks miserable for White) 23 ... a6 24 axb5 axb5 25 Bxc4 bxc4 26 Re3 d5 27 fxg6 f5 and we arrive at this interesting position from B.Lepelletier-J.Degraeve, Narbonne 1997.



Now, if you trust the computer, this position is evaluated by *Houdini* as equal However, for humans, it is a dreadful position to play for White. Although White is material up, Black's pawn roller is just getting started. White endured another torturous 18 moves before he resigned.

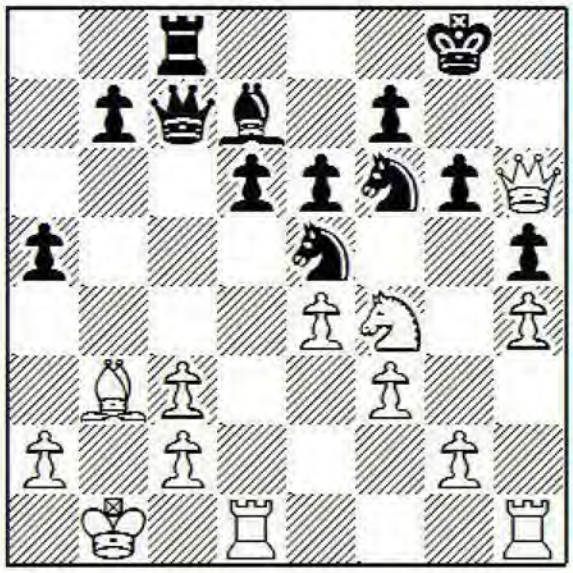
b) 16 ... Qxc3?! is considered inadequate after 17 Ne2 Qb4 18 Rd4?! (better is 18 Nf4 e6 19 Nd3 Nxd3 20 Rxd3 with a very pleasant position for White) 18 ... Qb6 19 Rhd1 Rc8 20 Nf4 Nc4 21 Nxg6 fxg6 22 e5 was played in O.Renet-J.Koch, Lyon 1990, and now Black should have played 22 ... dxe5 23 Qxg6+ Kf8 24 Rxd7 Nxd7 25 Qf5+ Kg7 26 Qxd7 Rc7 and he is still very much in the game, even if his king looks rather open.

c) 16 ... a5?! was the main continuation for Black but is now considered insufficient. Now 17 f4 Nfg4 (17 ... Nc4? is even worse 18 f5 a4 19 Bxc4 Qxc4 20 fxg6 Rc8 21 Rhf1 fxg6 22 Qxg6+ Kf8 23 e5 dxe5 24 Rxf6+ exf6 25 Qxf6+ and White is completely winning, Y.Lu-E.Kanter, Moscow 2011) 18 Qg5 a4 19 fxe5 axb3 20 cxb3 Nf2 (20 ... Nxe5 21 Qxe7 Qxc3 22 Qg5 Ra8 23 Qd2 is pretty unsatisfying for Black, H.Stefansson-S.Tiviakov, Gausdal 1993) 21 e6 Nxe4 (or 21 ... Nxh1? 22 exd7 Nf2 23 Ne6! and White is winning, I.Rogers-A.Pekarek, Prague 1992) 22 Qh6! Nxc3+ 23 Kb2 Nxd1+ 24 Rxd1 d5 (24 ... fxe6 25 Qxg6+ Kh8 26 Qxh5+ gives White an obvious advantage, N.Short-H.Olafsson, Wijk aan Zee 1987) 25 exd7 Qxd7 26 Qg5 Kh7 27 Qe5 Qg4 28 Rd2 Qxh4 29 Nf3 Qf6 30 Qxf6 exf6 31 Rxd5 gives White a winning endgame, J.Van der Wiel-Ki.Georgiev, Lugano 1987. This game caused a crisis for Black in the Soltis Variation but thankfully we have moved beyond that.

17 g4

This is the sharpest and best continuation. The alternatives are unimpressive:

a) 17 Ne2 was once played against me, but it worked out well for Black after 17 ... a5 18 Nf4?! (18 f4 Nc4 19 f5 a4 20 Bxc4 Qxc4 21 Rd3 Ng4 is obviously fine for Black but better than what my opponent played) and here, the little pawn move 18 ... e6! rendered the knight's tour superfluous.



White went all out with 19 g4? a4 20 gxh5 axb3 21 cxb3 Qxc3 22 hxg6 Qc2+ 23 Ka1 Ra8 24 gxf7+ Kxf7 25 a4 Bxa4 and thus resigned, L.Hyldkrog-Ca.Hansen, Lyngby 1989.

b) Also, 17 f4 Nc4 18 Bxc4 Qxc4 is fine for Black as after 19 Rhe1 Qxc3 20 f5 Rc4 21 Re3 Qb4+ 22 Rb3 Qc5 23 Qe3 b5 24 fxg6 fxg6, Black has excellent compensation for the exchange, J.Zapata Cuartas-R.Henao, Medellin 2000.

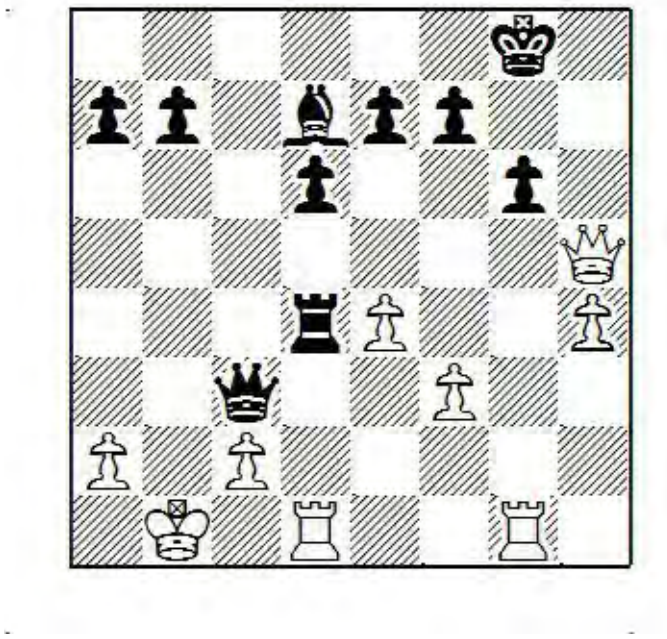
17 ... a5

The key alternative is 17 ... Qxc3.

a) Black must tread carefully after 18 gxh5 and as single misstep is fatal:

a1) 18 ... Nc4! 19 Bxc4 (White has also tried 19 Qc1, allowing Black time to capture on h5 and after 19 ... Nxh5 20 Rd3 Qb4 21 Rg1 a5 22 Ka1 a4 23 Bxc4 Qxc4 24 Qh6 Rc5 25 Rg5 e5 26 Rxh5 gxh5 27 Qg5+ Kf8 28 Qh6+ Kg8 29 Qg5+ Kf8 30 Qd8+ Kg7 31 Qg5+, a draw by perpetual check was made, F.Hellers-W.Watson, Herning 1991) 19 ... Rxc4 20 Rd3 Qa5!? (or 20 ... Qb4+?! 21 Rb3 Qc5 22 Ne2 Nxh5 23 Rxb7 Rb4+ 24 Rxb4 Qxb4+ 25 Ka1 Bb5 26 Rb1 Qc4 27 Nc1 Qc3+ 28 Rb2 a6 29 Qg5 with a complex position that should be better for White, A.Kovacevic-N.Ristic, Vrnjacka Banja 2005) 21 hxg6 Rxd4 22 gxf7+? (22 Rb3!? leads to a fascinating line that ends in a draw after 22 ... Be6 23 g7 Nh7 24 Rg1 f6 25 Qg6 Qa4 26 h5 Rb4 27 h6 Bxb3 28 axb3 Rxb3+ 29 cxb3 Qxb3+) 22 ... Kxf7 23 h5 Rxd3 24 Qg6+ Kf8 25 h6 Qb4+ 26 Kc1 and White resigned, C.Wittke-S.Feick, Berlin 1987.

a2) After the logical looking 18 ... Nxh5??, Black is undeniably lost. White goes for the jugular with 19 Rhg1! (threatening Qxh5, but if Black moves the knight, then h4-h5 will be decisive) 19 ... Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Qxh5 Rxd4.



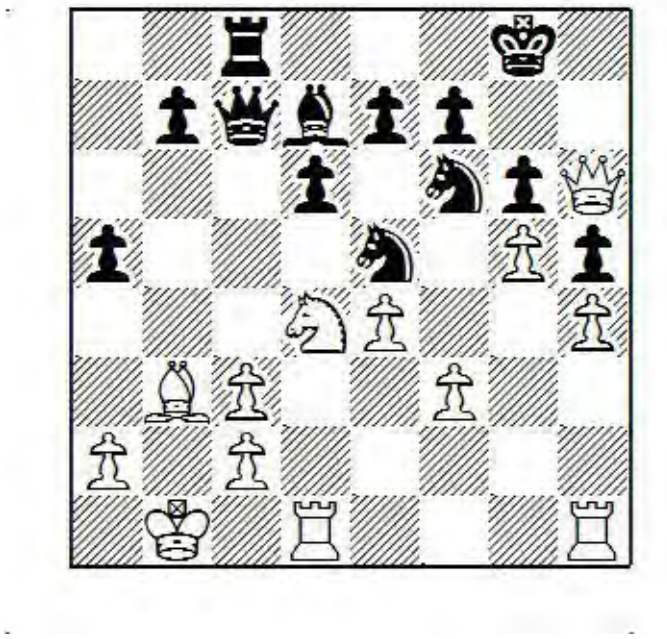
Exercise: How does White wrap up the game from here?

Answer: 22 Rxg6+!! fxg6 23 Qxg6+ Kf8 (23 ... Kh8? ends with mate rather rapidly after 24 Qh5+ Kg7 25 Rg1+ Kf8 26 Qh8+ Kf7 27 Qg7+ Ke6 28 Rg6#) 24 Qh6+ Kf7 25 Qh7+ Kf8 26 Qh8+ Kf7 27 Qxd4 and Black is lost, J.Bosch-M.Hoffmann, Germany 1999.

b) 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 exf5 hxg4 20 fxg6 Nc4 21 gxf7+ Kxf7 22 Qc1 g3 23 Rd3 Qb4 24 Rg1 a5 25 Ka1 a4 was played in D.Bokan-A.Fedorov, Moscow 1992, and now White should have played 26 c3 Qb5 27 Bxc4+ Qxc4 28 Qe3 Qxh4 though Black cannot be worse.

18 Nf5

a) I recall seeing the very bizarre-looking 18 g5, encasing the queen on h6.



This is an idea by the Finnish International Master Annti Pyhala in an issue of the Finnish chess magazine *Suomen Shakki* a long time ago. It has not found many followers and should not worry Black unduly, but it is not completely stupid either. If Black is not playing carefully, he can easily be torn apart:

a1) 18 ... Ne8 19 f4 a4 20 Bd5 e6 21 fxe5 exd5?? (after this blunder Black is losing, whereas the correct 21 ... Ng7 likely leads to a draw after 22 Rhf1 exd5 23 Rxf7 Kxf7 24 e6+ Bxe6 25 Qxg7+ Kxg7 26 Nxe6+ Kf7 27 Nxc7 Rxc7 28 exd5 with an even endgame) 22 e6 Bxe6 23 Nxe6 fxe6 24 Qxg6+ and

White is winning, A.Pyhala-K.Yndesdal, Gausdal 1990.

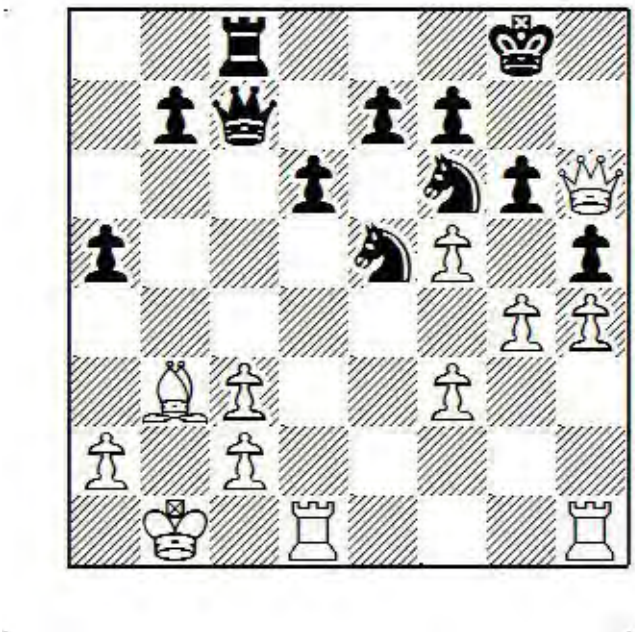
a2) 18 ... Nd5!? 19 Bxd5 e6 20 Nf5 (or 20 Bxe6 Bxe6 21 Nxe6 fxe6 22 Rd3 Qb6+ 23 Ka1 Qf2 24 Rb1 Qxc2 25 Rxb7 Qc1+ 26 Rb1 Qc2 with a draw by repetition) 20 ... gxf5 21 g6 Nxg6?? (21 ... fxg6 22 f4 Qxc3 23 fxe5 (23 Bb3 Nc4 24 Qxg6+ Kf8 25 Qh6+ Ke7 26 Qg5+ Ke8 with a draw) 23 ... Qxc2+ 24 Ka1 Qc3+ with a draw by perpetual check) 22 exf5 Qxc3, T.Pirttimaki-T.Laasanen, Jyvaskyla 1998 and White would be winning with 23 Bb3 Qh8 24 Qxh8+ Nxh8 25 Rxd6 Bc6 26 Rg1+ Kf8 27 fxe6 and it is soon over.

b) The more direct 18 gxh5 move has been tested in a couple of Kudrin games:

b1) Most definitely, Black cannot recapture with 18 ... Nxh5?? as 19 Rhg1, as previously indicated, wins for White.

b2) 18 ... a4 19 hxg6 (or 19 Bd5 Nxd5 20 exd5 Qxc3 21 hxg6 Qb4+ 22 Kc1 fxg6 23 Rhg1 Bf5 24 Nxf5 Qa3+ 25 Kb1 Qb4+ 26 Kc1 Qa3+ 27 Kb1 and a draw was agreed in F.Gobet-S.Kudrin, Bern 1988) 19 ... axb3 20 cxb3 Qxc3 21 gxf7+ Kxf7 (this is assessed as equal by *Houdini*, but there obviously still plenty left to play for) 22 Rhg1 Bh3 23 Rg3 Bf1 24 Rg7+ Ke8 25 Qh8+ Kd7 26 Rxe7+ Kxe7 27 Nf5+ Kd7 28 Qg7+ Kc6 29 Rxd6+ Kc5 30 Qg1+ Kb4 31 Qxf1?? (White made the mistake of blindly following another Kudrin game that led to a draw, rather than playing the actual drawing line, which is 31 Qb6+ Ka3 32 Qa7+ Ba6 33 Rxa6+ bxa6 34 Qxa6+) 31 ... b5! (instead 31 ... Qc2+ 32 Ka1 Nxf3?? 33 Rb6+ Ka3 34 Ra6+ bxa6 35 Qxa6+ Kb4 36 Qb7+ Ka3 37 Qa6+ was a draw in N.De Firmian-S.Kudrin, USA 1988) 32 Ne7 Rc7?? (32 ... Rc5! 33 Qd1 Nxf3 34 a3+ Kxa3 35 Ra6+ Kb4 and White is lost) 33 Rxf6?? (returning the favour as White could draw with 33 Qd1 Rxe7 34 a3+ Kxa3 35 Ra6+ Kb4 36 Qd6+ Qc5 37 Qd2+) 33 ... Qc2+ 34 Ka1 Qc1+ and facing a mate in two, White resigned in R.Reyes-S.Kudrin, Chicago 1989.

18 ... Bxf5 19 exf5!



Question: Does it not make more sense to recapture with the g-pawn, opening the g-file?

Answer: It would be obvious to think that, but the attack that White is hoping for is hardly going to happen, because Black's counterplay is arriving right now.

As we will see in the main game, the play against Black's king is far more dangerous after 19 exf5. Instead, praxis has shown that Black is fine after 19 gxf5 a4 20 Bxa4 Qxc3 21 Bb3 (after 21 fxg6?? Nc4 22 gxf7+ Kxf7 it is completely over for White, who resigned in M.Nouro-R.Molander, Espoo 2004) 21 ... Nc4 22 Qc1 Qxf3 23 fxg6 fxg6 24 Rhg1!? (or 24 Rhf1 Qc3 25 Rd3 Qe5 26 Bxc4+ Rxc4 27 Qf4 Qe6 28

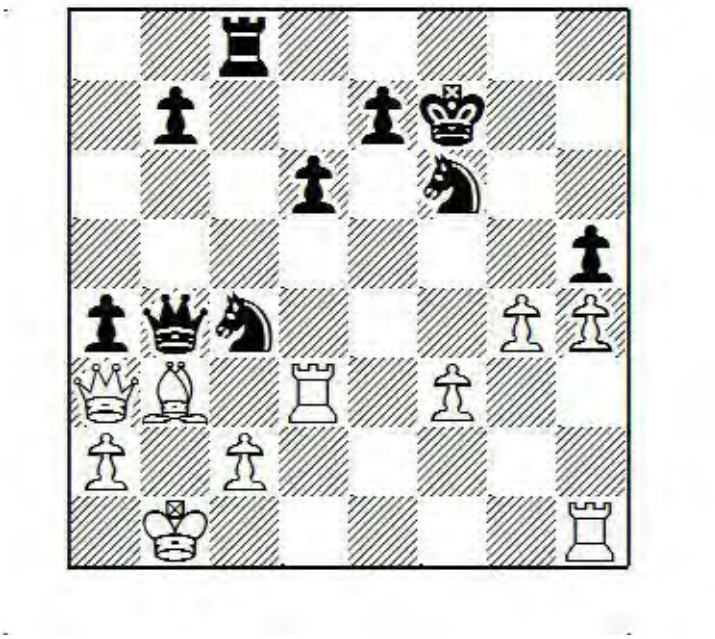
Qg5 Qxe4 29 Qe3 Qxe3 30 Rxe3 Kf7 and Black has a very winnable endgame, R.Pokorna-M.Calzetta Ruiz, Pula 1997) 24 ... Kh7 25 Qg5 Na3+ 26 Kc1 Qxe4 27 Rd2 Ng4 28 Qd5 Qe5 and a draw in M.Wahls-M.Gupta, Dortmund 1988. It would not have hurt anybody if play had continued a bit more though.

19 ... Qxc3

If Black tries 19 ... a4 as in the lines after 19 gxf5 above, we will quickly see that White is truly the one on command: 20 Bxa4 Qxc3 21 Bb3 Nc4 22 Qc1 Qxf3 23 fxg6 hxg4 (or 23 ... fxg6 24 Rhf1 Qc3 25 Rd3, and White is winning) 24 gxf7+ Kxf7 25 Rhf1 Qc3 26 Rd3 Qe5 27 Re3 Qd4 28 c3, and White is beginning to consolidate his advantage.

20 fxg6 Nc4 21 Qc1

Another possible idea is to open the a2-g8 diagonal with 21 gxf7+ Kxf7 22 Qc1 a4 23 Bxc4+ (*Houdini* recommends 23 Rd3! which looks like a clear mistake on account of 23 ... Qb4 with an apparently nasty pin on the b3-bishop, but then White has the unbelievable 24 Qa3!! available.



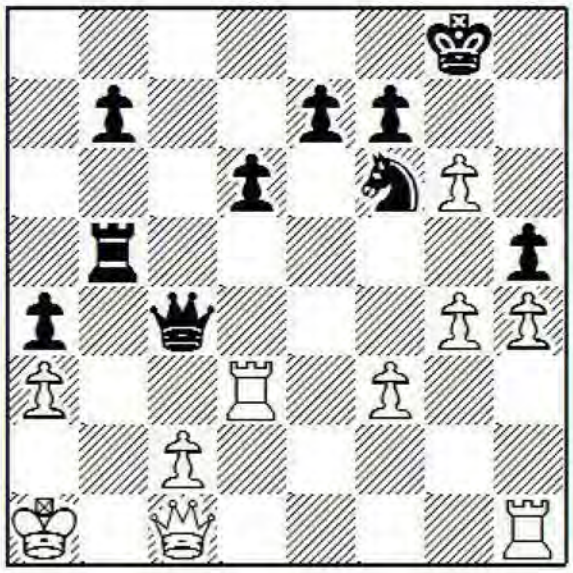
White is clearly better, say after 24 ... Qxa3 25 Bxc4+ Rxc4 26 Rxa3 hxg4 27 fxg4 Rxg4 28 Rc3) 23 ... Qxc4 24 Qd2 was played in W.Watson-S.Kudrin, Palma de Mallorca 1989, and now Black should have played 24 ... hxg4 25 fxg4 Ne4 26 Rdf1+ Ke8 27 Qd3 Nc3+ 28 Kc1 Nxa2+ 29 Kb2 a3+ 30 Qxa3 Qxc2+ 31 Ka1 Nc3 and White is trouble.

21 ... a4 22 Bxc4

Note that 22 gxf7+ Kxf7 23 Rd3 transposes to the *Houdini* line given in the note after White's 21st move.

22 ... Rxc4 23 a3 Rc5 24 Rd3 Rb5+ 25 Ka2 Qc4+ 26 Ka1

It looks as if Black has ample compensation for the exchange but the truth is actually quite different. Black's counterplay is running out and White begins to consolidate.



26 ... fxg6 27 Re1 Kf7 28 g5 Nd5?!

Or 28 ... Nd7 29 Re4 Qc6 30 Qe3 e5 31 Rc3 Rc5 32 Rxc5 Nxc5 33 Rb4 and White has excellent winning chances.

29 Re4?

White should have played 29 Qd2 Nb6 30 Rd4 Qc6 31 Rf4+ Ke8 32 Qd3 and Black's position is rapidly falling apart after 32 ... Kd7 33 Rfe4 Nc8 34 Rxa4 Rc5 35 Rb4 d5 36 Re2 and White is winning.

29 ... Qc5?!

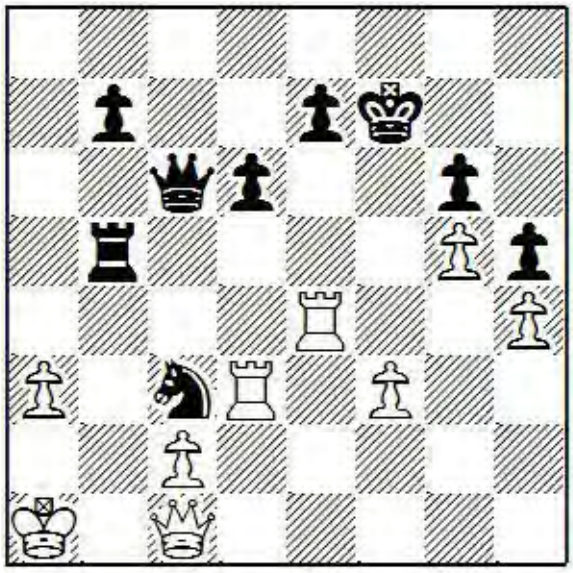
Black misses his chance to get back into the game via 29 ... Qc7 30 c4 Rc5 31 Kb2 Qb6+ 32 Ka2 Qc6 33 Kb1 (of course not 33 cxd5??, overlooking the intermediate move 33 ... Rc2+ and Black is playing for the win) 33 ... Qb6+ 34 Qb2 Qxb2+ 35 Kxb2 Nb6 with an interesting endgame ahead.

30 Rxa4?!

Once again White should have considered 30 Qd2 Nb6 31 Qe3 d5 32 Rf4+ Ke8 33 Qxc5 Rxc5 34 Rb4 with a better game for White.

30 ... Ke8?

After the much better 30 ... Qc6, Black should be fine, for instance after 31 Re4 Nc3 and White will have to give up his queen.



After 32 Rf4+ Ke8 33 Qe1 Rb1+ 34 Qxb1 Nxb1 35 Kxb1, a marginally better endgame for White is reached on the account of the two rooks versus queen situation. However, Black should have decent chances of saving a draw due to White's relatively open king.

31 Ra8+ Kd7 32 c4 Nf4?

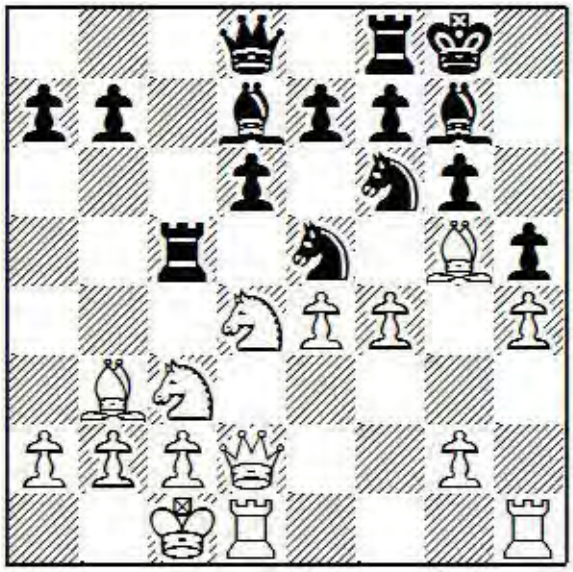
Now Black loses. He could have stayed in the game with 32 ... Qc6 33 Qc2 Nb6 34 Rc3 Re5 35 Rf8 d5 36 f4 Re1+ 37 Ka2 d4 with an unclear position. The two vulnerable kings means it will either end decisively or with a draw by perpetual check.

33 Rc3 Ra5 34 Rxa5 Qxa5 35 Qb2 Kc7 36 Re3 Kb8?! 37 Rxe7 Nd3 1-0

Black resigned before White could play 38 Qxb7 mate.

Game 51
C.Mokrys-P.Rubinas
Correspondence 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 Bb3 Rc8 11 h4 h5 12 0-0-0 Ne5 13 Bg5 Rc5 14 f4



At one point in the late 1980s, this line was played a fair amount and became less popular subsequently. It emerges every now and again and Black players are well-advised to remember these

lines.

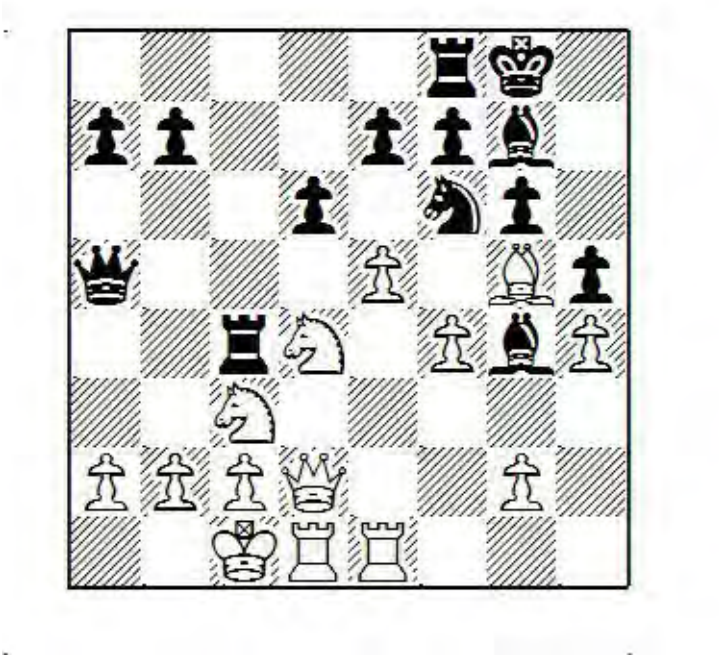
The then world champion Anatoly Karpov brought attention to 14 Rhe1 when he used it to beat Dragon specialist Genna Sosonko.

Now Black's primary tries are:

a) 14 ... b5 15 f4 (15 Kb1 transposes to lines which we will cover later in this chapter) 15 ... Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 (in the Karpov game, Black tried 16 ... bxc4 17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 e5 Bg7 19 e6 Bc8 20 exf7+ Rxf7 21 Ne6 Bxe6 22 Rxe6 Qa5 23 Qe3, A.Karpov-G.Sosonko, Tilburg 1979, and now 23 ... Bf6 24 Ne4 Qxa2 25 Nxc5 Qxb2+ 26 Kd2 dxc5 reaching a complex middlegame, would have been Black's best option) 17 e5 (17 Bxf6?! Bxf6 18 e5 Bg7 19 Ncxb5 Qb8 20 Nc3 dxe5 21 fxe5 Bg4 gives Black better chances, J.Nunn-A.Miles, London 1980) 17 ... b4 18 Qd3 Rxd4 19 Qxd4 bxc3 20 exf6 exf6 21 Qxd6 fxg5 22 Qxd7 Qa5 23 Re8 Qb4 24 Rxf8+ Bxf8 25 bxc3 Qxf4+ and even though Black eventually won the game, White is not worse at this point, D.Musanti-R.Felgaer, Villa Ballester 2000.

b) 14 ... Qa5:

b1) Note that after 15 f4 Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 e5, Black can ignore the hit on the knight with 17 ... Bg4!.

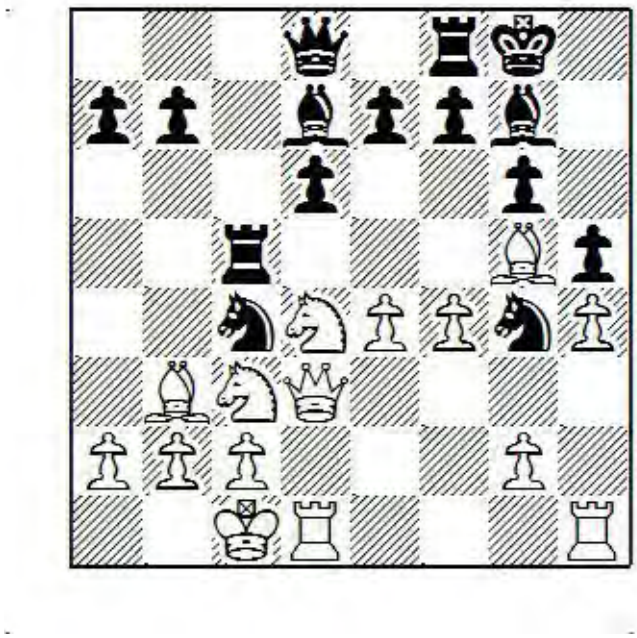


The theme with the bishop being trapped on g5 is worth remembering. After 18 Nf3 Rfc8 19 Re3 b5, Black was already better in P.Weichhold-S.Baumegger, Teplice 2013.

b2) 15 Kb1 Re8 (15 ... Rfc8 16 Nd5 Qxd2 17 Rxd2 Nxd5 18 exd5 Re8 19 c3 b5 is also fine for Black) 16 f4 Nc4 and now, a wonderful sequence of exchanges completely killed the tension in the game via 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Nd5 Qxd2 20 Nxf6+ exf6 21 Rxd2 f5 22 b3 Rc3 23 Rd3 Rxd3 24 cxd3 fxe4 25 dxe4 Bf5 26 Nxf5 gxf5 27 e5 and a draw was agreed in A.Beliavsky-Ki.Georgiev, Wijk aan Zee 1985.

14 ... Nc4 15 Qd3 Ng4!?

This move was pulled out of the hat just as the lines after 15 ... b5 were showing signs of being in a crisis.

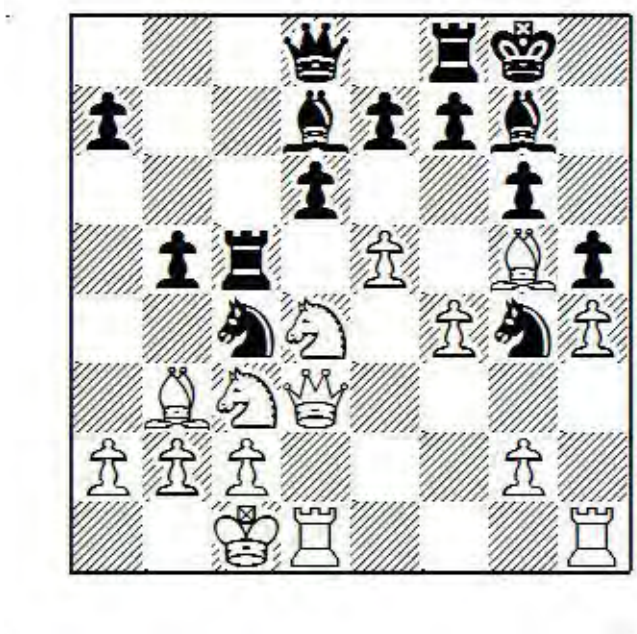


Question: What is the purpose of this move? Isn't Black shedding material unnecessarily since the c4-knight is insufficiently defended and the Ng4-f2 fork only succeeds in getting the knight trapped after capturing the h1-rook?

Answer: Yes. The knight does get trapped and White thus gains material advantage. But it's what the remaining Black forces can achieve on the queenside that counts. Moreover, White might need to expend time to recapture the knight and this gives Black the opportunity to launch his counterplay. In fact, in some lines Black will have to sacrifice even more material to continue his attack.

Instead, after 15 ... b5 16 e5, we have reached a position that was heavily analysed in the latter part of the 1980s:

a) Now, after 16 ... Ng4, we have a couple of interesting options:



a1) 17 Ne4!? Rc8 18 exd6 f6 19 Nc3 (19 Rhe1 exd6 20 Nxd6 Kh7 21 f5 Nxd6 22 fxg6+ Kh8 23 Bf4 Ne5 24 Bxe5 fxe5 25 Nf3 e4 26 Qxd6 exf3 27 Re7 Bg4 and White resigned in L.Ljubojevic-A.Miles, La Valetta 1980) 19 ... Nf2 20 Qxg6 was played in J.Timman-A.Schenk, Utrecht 1986, a thematic tournament where a group of amateurs were playing a group of top grandmasters. Here Black should have played 20 ... Qe8, and after 21 Qxe8 Rfxe8, the position is a total mess with chances to both sides.

a2) 17 exd6 was the main line move and now:

a21) 17 ... Nf2?! does not work for Black as after 18 Qf1 Nxd1 19 dxe7 Qa5 20 exf8Q+ Kxf8 21 Qxd1 Nxb2 22 Ne6+ Bxe6 23 Qd6+

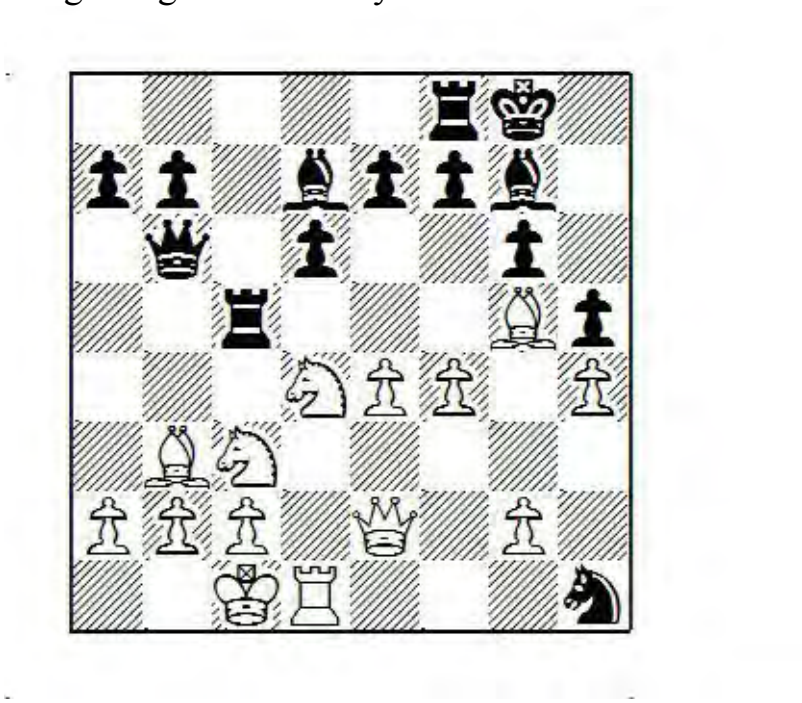
Kg8 24 Qxc5 Bxb3 25 Qc8+ Kh7 26 cxb3 Bxc3 27 f5, White is winning, T.Ernst-F.Hellers, Lugano 1986.

a22) 7 ... Rxg5 18 hxg5 Nf2 19 Qe2 Nxd1 20 Rxd1 Nxd6 21 Qd3 b4 (one tricky encounter went 21 ... Bg4 22 Rd2 Qb8 23 Qxg6 Nc4 24 Bxc4 bxc4 25 Qe4 e6 26 Nc6! Qb6 27 Ne5 Qg1+ 28 Nd1 c3 29 bxc3 Bxd1 30 Rxd1 Qc5 31 Rd7, J.Klovans-V.Ivanchuk, Tashkent 1987, with a defensible Black position as after 31 ... Bxe5 32 Qxe5 Qg1+ 33 Rd1 Qxg2 34 c4 h4 35 g6 Qxg6 36 Qd4 Kh7 37 Rh1 Qg3, Black should hold) 22 Nd5 a5 23 Qa6 Kh8 24 Nc6 Bxc6 25 Qxc6 Nf5 (this looks problematic for Black due to White's very active pieces, but things are not that simple) 26 c3? (26 g4 is more accurate and after 26 ... Nd4 27 Qc4 e6 28 Nf6 Bxf6 29 gxf6 Nxb3+ 30 axb3 Qxf6 31 gxh5 g5, the position is about even) 26 ... bxc3 27 bxc3 Qb8 and Black is much better, M.Ulibin-A.Shirov, Borzhomi 1988.

b) A relatively recent try is 16 ... Qc8 (a theme we discussed earlier, leaving the Nf6 en-prise since the g5-bishop has no escape square) 17 exf6 exf6 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Ne4 Bg7 20 Nxc5 dxc5 21 Nxb5 Bxb2+ 22 Kb1 Bxb5 23 Bxc4 Bxc4 24 Qxc4 Bg7 25 Rh3 and a draw was agreed in E.Fernandez Romero-P.Carlsson, Malaga 2008. The weak dark squares around White's king provide Black ample compensation for the exchange.

16 Bxc4 Nf2 17 Qe2 Nxh1 18 Bb3 Bg4

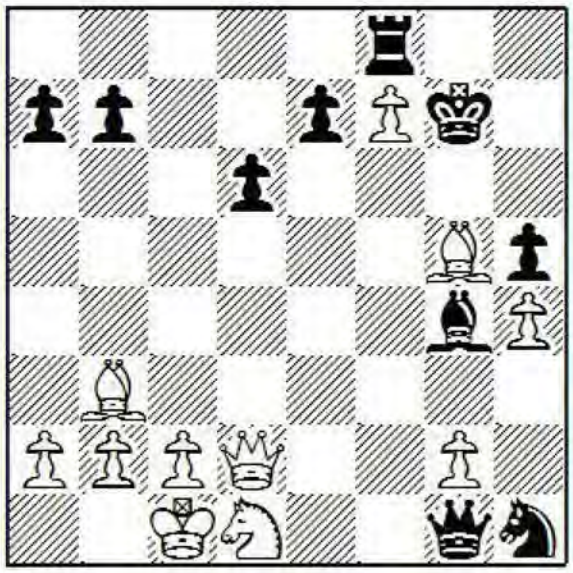
When this line was put back in business, Black employed 18 ... Qb6 with the idea of using the queen on the a7-g1 diagonal tactically.



a) 19 Nf3 has been Anand's choice on two occasions but now Black is in the driver's seat. The knight makes its presence felt after 19 ... Ng3! 20 Qe1 and here Gawain Jones suggested 20 Be6! when White's queenside comes under serious fire. After 21 Bxe6 (Jones analysed 21 Rd3 Bxb3 22 axb3 Rfc8 with a promising game for Black), Black breaks through with 21 ... Rxc3! and 22 bxc3?? (after 22 e5, Black can enter a promising ending with 22 ... Qe3+ or play for more with 22 ... Rc7) runs into 22 ... Bxc3! when suddenly the g3-knight becomes extremely useful with a threatened fork from the e2-square since White cannot reply 23 Qxc3.

b) 19 f5 forces the game into a situation with an interesting material imbalance: 19 ... Bxd4 20 Rxd4 Rxf5 21 exf5 Qxd4, Black is up with an exchange, but the White pieces are for a change perfectly coordinated to jump all over Black's king:

b1) 22 fxg6 Qg1+ 23 Nd1 Bg4 24 gxf7+ Kg7 25 Qd2 and we come to an interesting juncture.



Question: Black has two plausible moves in the position. Trade queens and knights on d1 or return the exchange with ... Rxf7 while keeping the queens on the board. Which is better?

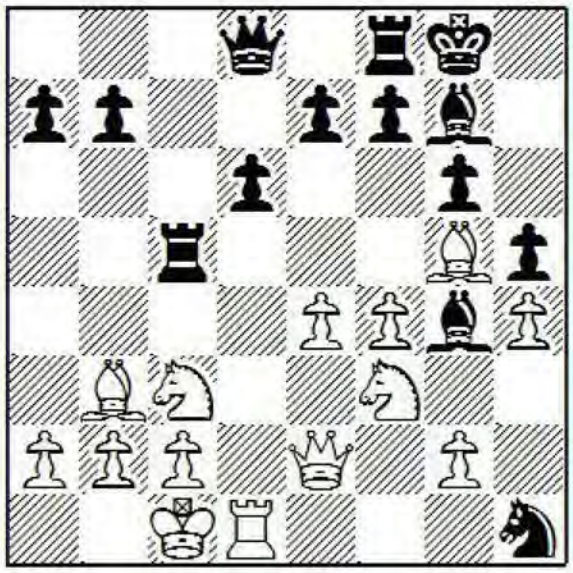
Answer: Black should not rush to exchange the queens and keep the pressure on by keeping the queen and knight tandem.

b11) The better choice is 25 ... Rxf7! 26 Bxf7 Kxf7 27 Qd5+ Ke8 28 Be3 Qf1 29 Bxa7 Ng3 30 Be3 Bxd1 31 Qxd1 Qxg2 and the queen and knight are a good pair in this complicated ending.

b12) Less accurate is 25 ... Qxd1+ 26 Qxd1 Bxd1 27 Kxd1 Rxf7 28 Bxf7 Kxf7 29 Ke2 Ng3+ 30 Kf3 Nf1 31 Ke4 as played in J.Klovans-S.Tiviakov, Groningen 1991. Even if endgame should be about even, White went on to win it rather confidently because it is not all that easy to defend with a knight against a bishop, when then pawns are spread over two wings. Black's best option now was likely 31 ... e5!? 32 Kd5 Kg6! 33 c4 (The point behind the previous moves is that 33 Kxd6? does not work on account of 33 ... e4, and the pawn will cost White the bishop) 33 ... Kf5 34 b3 e4 35 Kd4 Ng3 36 Ke3 Nf1+ 37 Kf2 Nh2 38 Ke2 Ng4 and neither side is likely to make any further progress.

b2) A more recent try is 22 Qe1 Bxf5 23 Qxh1 e6 24 Qe1 a6 25 Be3 Qg4 26 g3 as played in B.Macieja-G.Jones, Warsaw 2010. Now, Black should have played the flexible 26 ... Qf3 27 a4 Rc8 28 a5 f6 29 Bd4 Kg7 and he should be fine.

19 Nf3



19 ... Rxc3 20 bxc3 Qa5 21 Rxh1

Alternatively, after 21 Rd3 Bxc3 (threatening ... Qa3+ followed by invasion with ... Qb2) 22 Qe3 Rc8:

a) The premature 23 f5? allows the queen to becomes a nuisance after 23 ... Qa3+ 24 Kd1 Qb2 25 fxg6 Qa1+ 26 Qc1 Nf2+ 27 Ke2 Nxd3 28 gxf7+, R.Eames-I.Snape, Birmingham 2005. Black should now have played 28 ... Kg7 29 Bh6+ Kh7 30 cxd3 Qxc1 31 Bxc1 Kg7 32 Bg5 e6 33 Be7 Kxf7 34 Bxd6 Bd4 with excellent winning chances for Black.

b) Better is 23 Kb1 e6 24 Nd4 Qc5 25 f5 with chances for both sides.

21 ... Qxc3 22 Rf1

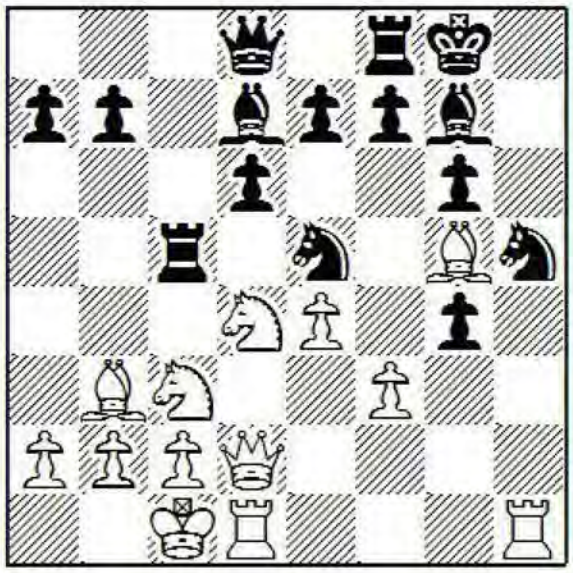
Not willing to settle for a draw, White has also tried 22 Qd1 Bxf3?! (Black has a clear improvement in 22 ... a5 23 Bxe7 Qb2+ 24 Kd2 Re8 25 Bxd6 Rxe4 26 Qa1 (otherwise White will get mated) 26 ... Qxa1 27 Rxa1 Bxf3 28 gxf3 Rd4+ 29 Ke3 Rxd6 with a better endgame for Black) 23 gxf3 Qe3+ 24 Kb1 Qc3 25 e5 dxe5 26 Qd3 and White has warded Black's threats off, T.Ernst-J.Asendorf, Hamburg 2005.

22 ... Qa1+ ½-½

The game is drawn by perpetual check.

Game 52
Kr.Georgiev-D.Komljenovic
Biel 1989

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Bc4 Bd7 9 Qd2 0-0 10 h4 Rc8 11 Bb3 h5 12 0-0-0 Ne5 13 Bg5 Rc5 14 g4 hxg4 15 h5 Nxh5!



Question: Why not take on h5 with the pawn instead since 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 Rxh5?? is unplayable due to 17 ... Nxf3 (which will ensure a massive material gain for Black)?

Answer: The pawn recapture has actually been attempted several times in tournament praxis. The problem for Black is that the loose kingside cover will continue to haunt him for a long time. White's f-pawn also has been given the mobility to move unimpeded and will help to press Black's centre and kingside.

One particularly galling example involving two grandmasters went 15 ... gxh5?! 16 f4 Nc6 (Black is also suffering after 16 ... Nc4 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 e5 Bg7 20 Qd3 and without his knights to help guard the kingside, Black is having real problems holding his position together) 17 Nde2 Be6 18 Kb1 Bxb3 19 cxb3 e6 (it is not easy coming up with a good alternative as 19 ... Qa5, 19 ... Qc8 and 19 ... Qd7 all run into 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 f5) 20 Ng3!? Qa5? (the alternative 20 ... Rxg5 21 fxg5 Nh7 22 Rxh5 Ne5 is Black's best option though he is clearly suffering) 21 e5 dxe5 22 Bxf6 Bxf6 23 Nxh5 Be7 24 f5 Nb4 and with mate in four looming, Black called it quits, J.Becerra Rivero-R.Antonio, Alcobendas 1994.

16 Nd5

The alternatives are pretty depressing:

a) 16 f4 Nc4 17 Qe2 Rxg5 18 fxg5 Ne5 19 Rxh5 gxh5 20 Qh2 g3 and White resigned in D.Kaiumov-G.Serper, Soviet Union 1986.

b) 16 Rxh5? gxh5 17 Nd5 Rxd5 18 Bxd5 gxf3 19 Nf5 Bxf5 20 exf5 Qd7 21 Qf4 Rc8 and Black is winning, A.Rios Parra-A.Shirov, Tunja 1989 .

16 ... Rxd5

This move, eliminating the annoying d5-knight, should not come as a surprise. In this case though, Black has a good alternative in 16 ... Re8, after which White has:

a) 17 f4 Nc4 and at this point, White has tried nearly every legal queen move as well as a few other moves. Some of the more important options are:

a1) 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 Nf5 and now after 19 ... Rxe4! 20 Nxd6 Rd4 21 Qe1 Rxd5 22 Rxd5 Qb6, Black is winning.

a2) 18 Qd3 Qc8! 19 Nxe7+ Rxe7 20 Bxe7 Nxf4 21 Qf1 Nh5 and Black obviously has more than enough for the exchange.

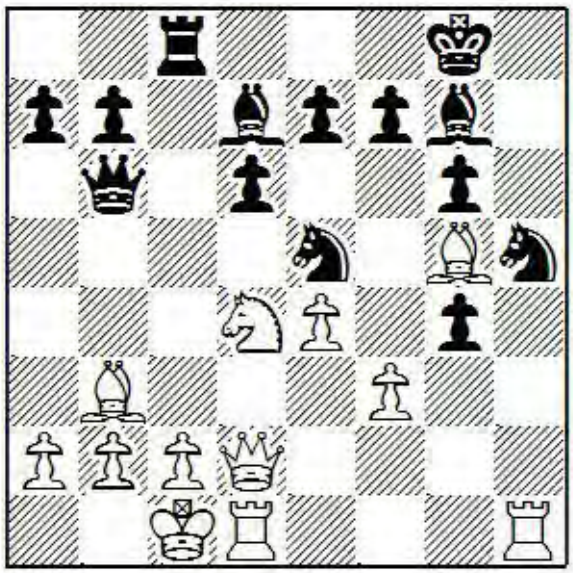
a3) 18 Qe2 b5 19 f5 is one of White's more testing tries as seen in I.Pinheiro-G.Jones, Internet (blitz) 2009, but again 19 ... Rxd5! promises Black the better chances after 20 exd5 Bxd4 21 Rxd4 Bxf5 22 Bxc4 bxc4 23 Qxc4 Qa8 and Black has excellent compensation for the exchange.

a4) 18 Qf2 has been played several times, yet Black has yet to try the strongest move in the position (and no, you do not get any points for guessing it) 18 ... Rxd5! 19 exd5 Na5 20 f5 Nxb3+ 21 axb3 Qa5 22 Kb1 Qxd5 and Black already has three pawns for the exchange.

b) Finally, 17 Rxh5 gxh5 18 Qh2 has been tried, but this too is utterly harmless as after 18 ... gxf3!? 19

Qxh5 f2 20 Rh1 Qa5 21 Bd2 Qa6 22 Ne2 f1R+ 23 Rxf1 Bg4 and White's material deficit convinced him to give up in L.Garcia-D.Komljenovic, Ubeda 1996.

17 Bxd5 Qb6 18 Bb3 Rc8!



Activating the last dormant piece and preparing ... Nc4.

Black has another appealing option in 18 ... a5 and now:

a) 19 f4?! Nc6! 20 Nxc6 Bxc6 21 c3 (addressing the imminent threat of ... a5-a4) was M.Bengafer-J.Hakki, Dubai 2005, but here Black has 21 ... Ng3 22 Bc2 Nxe4 and Black is well on the way to winning the game.

b) 19 Rxh5? is a strangely over-optimistic, doomed-to-fail attempt that should not harm Black, as after 19 ... gxh5 20 Qh2 gxf3 21 Qxh5 Bg4 22 Qh4 f2, White's position collapses, G.Kjurkchiiski-M.Perunovic, Bansko 2010.

c) However, 19 Bh6!? is probably White's best choice when 19 ... Nd3+!? 20 cxd3 Bxd4 21 Kb1 gxf3 (now the game sharpens considerably) 22 Rxh5! a4! 23 e5 axb3 24 Bxf8 bxa2+ 25 Ka1 gxh5 26 Qg5+ Kxf8 27 Qh6+ results in a perpetual check.

19 Nf5?

Question: This knight sortie sacrifice (or in this case, pseudo-sacrifice) is quite typical in the Yugoslav Attack. So why attach a question mark to it, since it makes good sense to prise the g-pawn away from defending the h5-knight?

Answer: The main problem is that the move actually helps Black to unleash the Dragon bishop's diagonal to hit the b2-pawn. In the Yugoslav attack, every tempo counts. One slight slip and it can be curtains.

White's other options:

a) 19 Bh6 Bf6 20 Bg5 Bg7 21 Bh6 Bf6 22 Bg5 Nd3+ (no draw!) 23 Kb1 Qxd4 24 Bxf6 Qxf6 25 Qxd3 was M.Ikonomopoulou-I.Hakki, Nikea 2006, and now 25 ... g3 seems to give Black a slight edge.

b) 19 Bxe7 Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Nb3 gxf3 22 Bxd6 Rxe4 23 Bc5 Qf6 24 Bd4 Rxd4 was N.Sehner-R.Seppeur, Germany 1985. White played 25 Qxd4 (better is 25 Nxd4 though Black retains the easier game) and Black missed a chance to get a clear advantage with 25 ... Qxd4 26 Nxd4 f2 and ... Ng3 is looming.

19 gxf5 20 Rxh5 Nc4

Winning the b2-pawn and cracking a wide hole in White's pawn shield.

21 Qh2

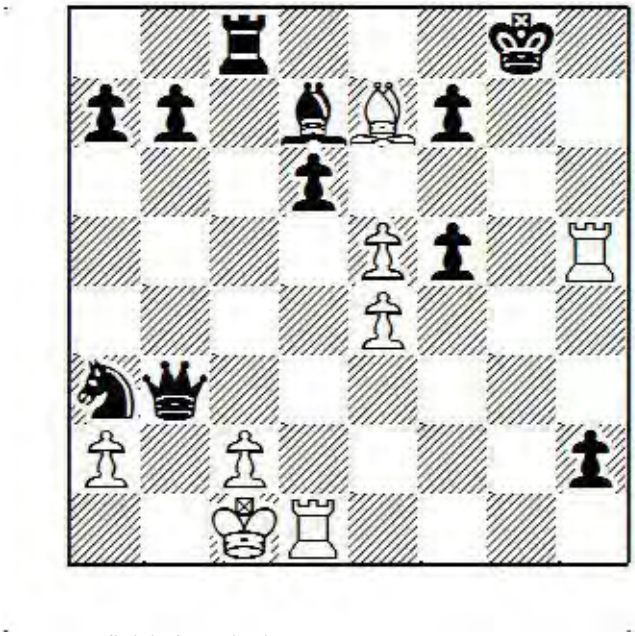
In bad positions there are no good moves. For instance, after 21 Qg2 Bxb2+ 22 Kb1 Bg7 23 Bh6 (or 23 Bc1 Ne3 24 Bxe3 Qxe3 and due to the threat of ... Qc3, White has to play Qd2, which is the end of White's counterplay) 23 ... Na3+ 24 Kc1 Rxc2+ 25 Qxc2 Nxc2 26 Bxg7 Kxg7 27 Kxc2 Qf2+ 28 Kb1

Qxf3, Black is easily winning with his landslide of pawns.

21 ... Bxb2+ 22 Kb1 Be5 23 f4 Na3+ 24 Kc1 g3 25 fxe5 gxh2 26 Bxe7

Amazingly, a later game followed up to this very move and instead 26 Rxh2 was played in F.Fernandez Bouza-R.Cubero Ferreiro, Naron 1995. Now Black should have avoided any potential headaches about his king getting trapped by White's rooks and bishop by playing 26 ... Nxc2! 27 Bxc2 Ba4 28 exd6 Bxc2 29 Rxc2 Rxc2+ 30 Kxc2 exd6 and Black is winning rather easily.

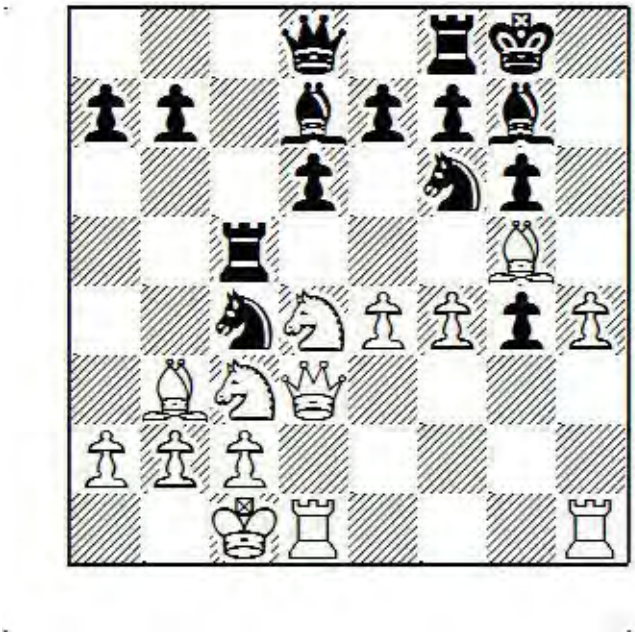
26 ... Qxb3 0-1



A pretty finish for Black!

Game 53
Y.Gruenfeld-Cu.Hansen
Jerusalem 1986

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Bc4 0-0 9 Qd2 Bd7 10 h4 Rc8 11 Bb3 h5 12 0-0-0 Ne5 13 Bg5 Rc5 14 g4 hxg4 15 f4 Nc4 16 Qd3



This is a multi-purpose move which keeps an eye on the c4-knight and his own c3-steed (in anticipation of a future ... Nxb2 sacrifice). It also supports the f4-f5 push and indirectly eyes the g6-pawn (after an e4-e5 push). In Game 54, we will look at 16 Qe2.

The other alternative, 16 Bxc4 has not been of much use to White. One example is 16 ... Rxc4 17 e5 Nh7! (17 ... dxe5?! 18 fxe5 Nh5 19 Nb3 Rc7 20 Rhe1 is fully playable for White) 18 exd6? (18 Qd3 Rxc3! 19 Qxc3 Nxg5 20 hxg5 dxe5 21 fxe5 Qb8! is only a little better for Black) 18 ... Nxg5 (the idea behind the previous move, eliminating the bishop) 19 Qe2 e5 20 hxg5 Rxd4 21 Rxd4 exd4 22 Nd5 (this was possibly White's big idea, but it does not work) 22 ... Re8 23 Ne7+ Kf8 24 Rh7 Rxe7 25 dxe7+ Qxe7 26 Qxe7+ Kxe7 27 Rxg7 g3 and nobody catches that pawn, N.Vorontsov-P.Kotsur, Ashkhabad 1996.

16 ... b5

As we have seen in the previous games, Black sometimes gives preference to 16 ... Qc8, which gets the queen out of the d-file, adds pressure to the c-file and it can later be involved in the action on the kingside. After 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Bxf6 Rxc3 19 bxc3 Bxf6 20 h5 (it may look like White is breaking through on the kingside but he isn't that fast) 20 ... g5 21 fxg5 Bxg5+ 22 Kb2 Qc5 23 Rhg1 Rc8 and Black is doing very well, A.Fejzullahu-R.Polzin, Rethymnon 2003.

17 f5

This move has the downside that it returns the e5-square to Black. However, the alternatives have proved unimpressive:

a) After 17 h5, now we have a couple of interesting options:

a1) 17 ... Nxh5 18 Nd5 (18 f5? is easily refuted by 18 ... Bxd4! 19 Qxd4 e5! 20 Bxd8 exd4 and White has lost a piece, A.Rodriguez Cespedes-R.Hernandez Onna, Bayamo 1984) 18 ... Nxf4 (18 ... f6! is also very good) 19 Bxf4 e5 20 Bg3 exd4 21 Bxc4 bxc4 22 Qd2 Rxd5 23 exd5 Bf5 24 Qh2 g5 25 Bxd6 Re8 and Black has the better chances, Qi Jingxuan-J.Speelman, Taxco 1985.

a2) 17 ... Rxg5!? 18 fxg5 Nxh5 19 Kb1 e6 20 Bxc4 bxc4 21 Qxc4 Qxg5 22 Qc7 Qc5 23 Qxd7 Bxd4, and Black is well on his way to winning the game, W.Watson-Ki.Georgiev, Amsterdam 1985.

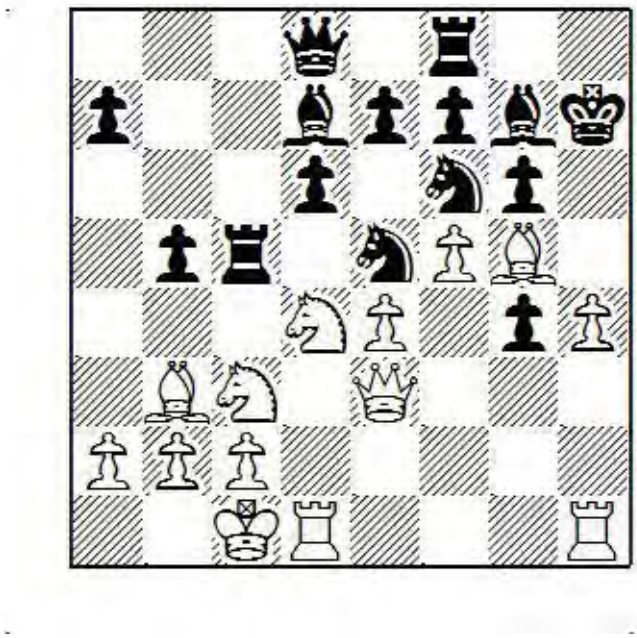
b) 17 e5 dxe5 18 Ndxb5?! (18 Bxf6 exf6 19 Ndxb5 Nb6 is a better option for White, leaving the game complicated with chances to both sides) 18 ... Nxb2! 19 Kxb2 e4 20 Qd2 Qb6 21 Nd4 Rfc8 22 Nce2 a5 and Black is winning, J.Atri Sangari-G.Vescovi, Moscow 1994.

c) 17 Bxf6!? Bxf6 18 e5 dxe5! 19 Ndxb5 Nxb2! 20 Kxb2 exf4 21 Kc1 e6 22 Qxd7 Qxd7 23 Rxd7 Bxc3 24 Nxc3 Rxc3 and we have a fascinating position that should be good for Black.

17 ... Ne5!?

Black has a strong alternative in 17 ... gxf5 and after 18 exf5 Qc8 19 Rhf1 Ne5 20 Qe3 Rxc3 (20 ... a5!? 21 a3 Rxc3 22 Qxc3 Qxc3 23 bxc3 Rc8 is possibly even better) 21 Qxc3 Qxc3 22 bxc3 Rc8 23 Ne2 Kf8 24 Bd5, for some reason here a draw was agreed in G.Sax-Ki.Georgiev, Montreal 1986, but Black looks very good after 24 ... Nxd5 25 Rxd5 f6 26 Bf4 a6 when only Black can be better as White's pawns are a mess.

18 Qe3 Kh7!



Question: This looks a little desperate, having to move the king like this. Is Black in trouble?

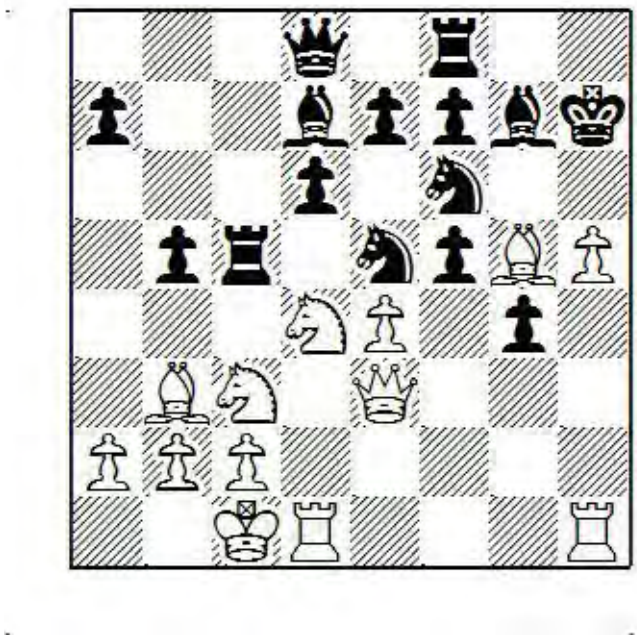
Answer: Black is not in trouble. This is prophylaxis, making advance preparations to take some potential bullets out of White's guns. I love this cool move, which in commentators' opinion is not the strongest, but it is very hard for White to get real initiative going on the kingside.

One reasonable alternative is 18 ... b4 19 Bxf6 Bxf6 20 Nd5 gxf5 21 exf5 a5 (21 ... Kg7!? is not mentioned by Vigorito in this notes to the game, but it looks like an improvement) 22 Nxf6+ exf6 23 Ne6 Bxe6 24 fxe6 Kg7 25 exf7 f5 26 h5 Qf6 as played in L.Aguero Jimenez-Y.Gutierrez Delgado, Havana 2009, and now White's best would have been 27 Qf4 Rfc8 28 Rh2 Nxf7 29 Bxf7 Kxf7 30 Rxd6 Qe5 31 Qh6! and Black cannot prevent White from delivering perpetual check if he so desires.

19 h5

A key alternative for White is 19 fxg6+ though after 19 ... fxg6! 20 Bxf6 Rxf6 21 h5 gxh5 22 Rxh5+ Rh6, Black is doing very well.

19 ... gxf5



20 h6?!

The text move secures the pawn for the moment, but does nothing to hurt Black. However, it is difficult

to come up with any useful suggestions for White. Instead, 20 exf5 was played in another Curt Hansen game and after 20 ... Rxc3 (20 ... a5!? is also pleasant for Black):

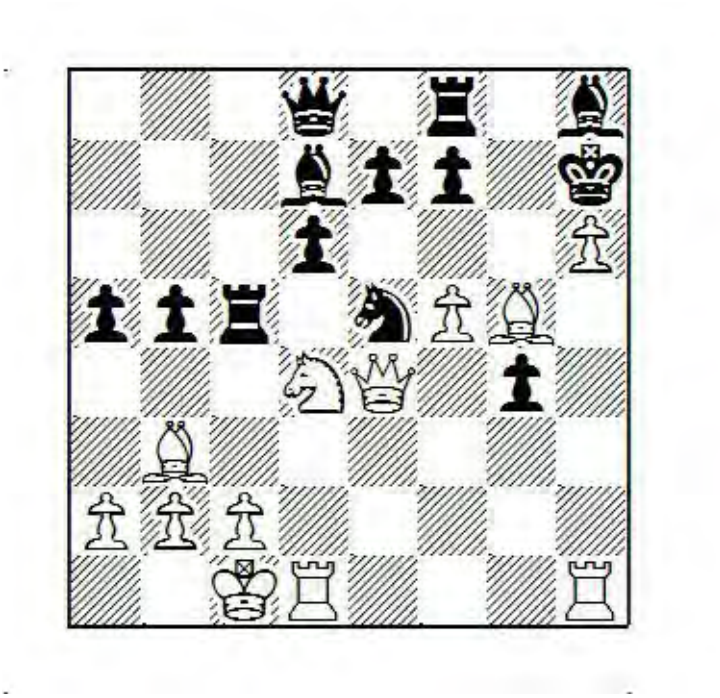
a) In one of my own games, my opponent blundered with 21 Qxc3?? and after 21 ... Ne4 22 Qe3 Nxg5, he resigned. I had used only ten minutes for the game, six of which was expended because I was stuck in the bathroom due to a jammed lock!

b) 21 bxc3 a5 22 h6 Bh8 23 Bf4 a4 24 Bxe5 axb3 25 Bxf6 Bxf6 26 axb3 e5 27 Qe4 exd4 28 Qxg4 Bc6 (Black is winning) 29 Rh2 Rg8 30 Qh5 Bd5 31 cxd4 Qa5 32 Rh4 Bxh4 33 Qxh4 Qa1+ and White resigned in E.Mortensen-Cu.Hansen, Denmark 1986.

20 ... Bh8 21 exf5 a5 22 Ne4?

It seems logical to remove Black's f6-knight because as long as it is there, nothing is going to get rolling on kingside. The alternative 22 Bxf6 Bxf6 23 Ne4 Qb6 24 Nxc5 dxc5 25 Ne2 Bxf5 looks very unpleasant for White.

22 ... Nxe4 23 Qxe4



Exercise: What is Black's best move?

23 ... Qa8!

Answer: With this very strong move which forces the White queen off the b1-h7 diagonal, Black completely kills White's initiative, leaving White uncoordinated and a pawn down.

24 Qxa8 Rxa8

The queens have come off the table, but Black still possesses the initiative. On top of that, he has an extra pawn with the f5- and h6-pawns not looking too healthy.

25 Bxe7

Since the game continuation is very one-sided, it is natural to look at alternatives. The most obvious one is to give the b3-bishop a breathing hole with 25 a3, but even then Black is much better after 25 ... Rac8 26 c3 (26 Rh2 Nc4 27 Re2 Re5 28 c3 Rxe2 29 Nxe2 f6 30 Bh4 Bxf5 leaves White a couple of pawns down) 26 ... b4 27 Bxe7 bxa3 28 f6 axb2+ 29 Kxb2 Rxc3 30 Bc2+ Rxc2+ (30 ... Ng6 can also be played, but the text is better) 31 Nxc2 Ba4 32 Rh2 g3 33 Re2 Ng4 and the f-pawn falls next, leaving Black much better on account of his bishop pair, the better coordinated active pieces and White's exposed king.

25 ... a4

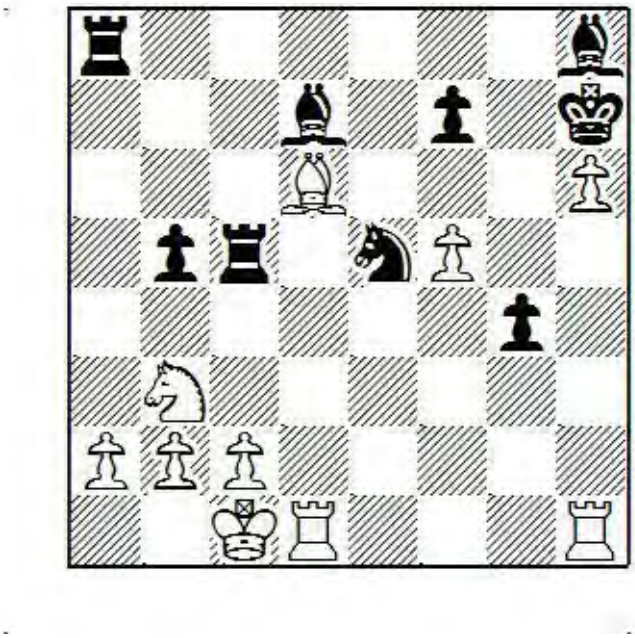
The bishop is trapped. This theme is relatively common in this line of the Dragon, but of course it all depends on what White does to get himself out of this mess.

26 Bxd6

This could possibly have been the move White was banking on to keep him in the game, but the Dane

had calculated further.

26 ... axb3 27 Nxb3



27 ... Rxc2+

Black also wins after 27 ... Rcc8 28 Bxe5 Bxf5 29 Nd4 Bxe5 30 Nxf5 Rxa2 but the game continuation is both flashier and better.

28 Kxc2 Bxf5+ 29 Kd2

Or 29 Kc3 Nd3+ 30 Kd2 Rd8 31 Bc7 Rd7 32 Bg3 Nxb2+ and now Black just liquidates to a simply won ending with 33 Ke2 Nxd1 34 Rxd1 Rxd1 35 Kxd1 Kxh6.

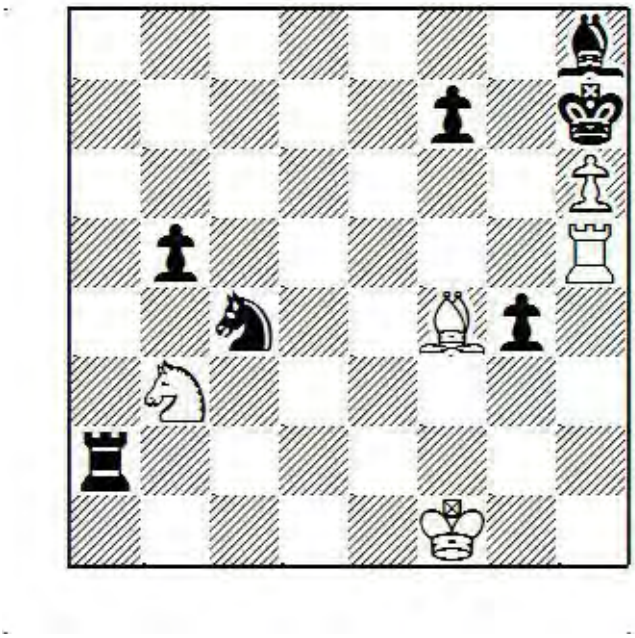
29 ... Nc4+ 30 Ke1 Bc2

Winning back the exchange.

31 Bf4 Bxd1 32 Kxd1 Rxa2

Black is only up a pawn, but this is nevertheless hopelessly lost for White and it does not take many moves for the Danish grandmaster to finish White's uncoordinated forces.

33 Rh5 Nxb2+ 34 Ke2 Nc4+ 35 Kf1



Exercise: White is poised to regain one of his lost pawns. What is Black's best move to wrap up the game?

Answer: Pushing the passed g-pawn down impudently. After all, it cannot be taken and will soon be helping in the final kill.

35 ... g3! 36 Kg1

If White takes the pawn, it is also over very quickly after 36 Bxg3 Ne3+ 37 Kg1 (or 37 Ke1 Bc3+ 38 Nd2 Rxd2) 37 ... Rg2+ 38 Kh1 Rxg3 and Black is a piece up.

36 ... Rf2! 37 Rf5

Also, 37 Bxg3 Rf3 wins a piece for Black.

37 ... Ne3! 0-1

After 37 ... Ne3 38 Rxf7+ Kg8 39 Bxe3 Rxf7 40 Kg2 Rc7, Black wins easily.

Game 54
V.Ivanchuk-V.Topalov
Belgrade 1995

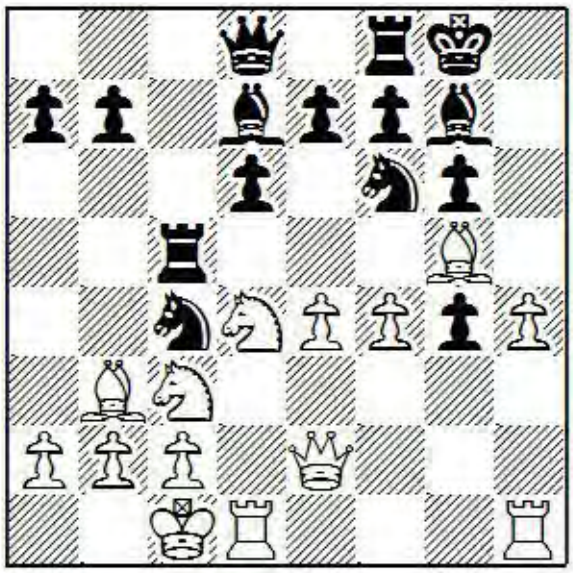
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 h4 Rc8 11 Bb3 h5 12 0-0-0 Ne5 13 Bg5 Rc5 14 g4 hxg4 15 f4 Nc4

Black has also tested the retreat 15 ... Nc6!?:

a) 16 e5 Nxd4 17 Qxd4 Bc6 18 Rhe1 Bf3 19 Rd2 was played in L.Yudasin-L.Ljubojevic, Moscow 1994 and Black should have tried 19 ... Nh5 20 Qd3 Qc7 21 Na4 Ra5 22 Qxg6 dxe5 23 Qxh5 e4 with a fascinating position as White's queen is in a great degree of trouble on h5.

b) 16 ... Bxf6! (16 ... exf6 17 f5 Nxd4 18 Qxd4 Bc6 19 Rhg1 looks better for White) 17 e5 Bg7 (17 ... Nxe5!? 18 fxe5 Rxe5 is a better option for Black) 18 Qg2?? and surprisingly, here a draw was agreed in W.So-Li Chao, Dubai 2008, even though Black is winning after 18 ... Nxd4 19 Rxd4 Bc6 20 Ne4 Qb6 21 c3 dxe5 22 fxe5 Rxe5. Instead White should have played 18 h5! Na5 19 hxg6 Nxb3 20 axb3 with much better chances for White.

16 Qe2



This makes more sense than 16 Qd3 which was the topic of the previous game.

Question: Why is this move considered more sensible?

Answer: On the e2-square:

1) The queen is less susceptible to threats from Black's knights such as ... Ne5 or ... Nxb2.
2) It also applies pressure on the c4-knight.
3) It supports a potential e4-e5 central pawn push.

16 ... Qc8!?

Question: What about this queen shift? What does it do for Black?

Answer: This is one of the more recent developments for Black in this line. Earlier Black played ... b7-b5 automatically. The queen shift:

1) Guards the c4-knight.

2) Threatens ... Nxb2.

3) Gets the queen away from potential file-opening tactics on the d-file.

4) Helps fight against potential f4-f5 pawn break.

Let's look at a couple of alternatives:

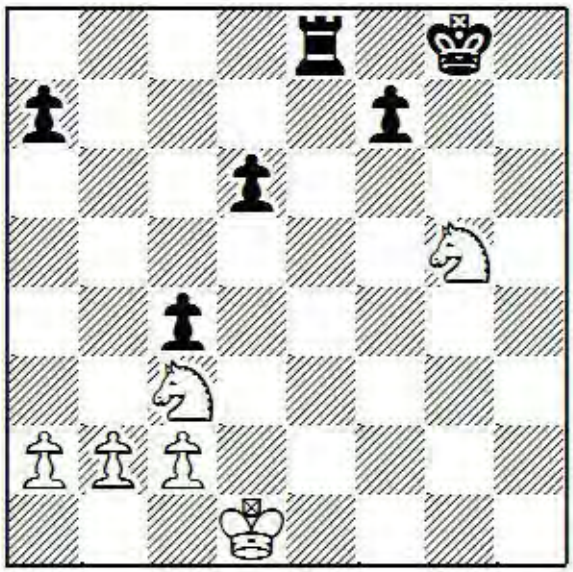
a) In the old main line with 16 ... b5, things are far more complicated. For instance:

a1) 17 h5?! Nxh5! 18 f5, S.Sulskis-E.Kahn, Budapest 1995, and now 18 ... Qa5 19 Bxc4 Rxc4 20 Nb3 Qd8 21 Nd5 Re8 22 fxg6 fxg6 promises Black the better chances with his two extra pawns.

a2) 17 f5, with two options for Black:

a21) 17 ... gxf5 18 Bxf6 and now:

a211) 18 ... Bxf6 19 exf5 Rxf5 20 Qxg4+ Rg5 21 hxg5 Bxg4 22 gxf6 exf6 23 Rdg1 f5 24 Rh5 (or 24 Bxc4 Qg5+ 25 Kb1 bxc4 26 Nd5 Kg7 27 Ne3 Kg6 28 Ndxf5 Bxf5 29 Rxg5+ Kxg5 30 Rg1+ Kf4 31 Nxc4 d5 with an even ending, T.Gharamian-A.Timofeev, Oropesa del Mar 2001) 24 ... Re8 25 Bxc4 bxc4 26 Rxf5 Qh4 27 Nf3 Qh6+ 28 Kd1 Qg6 29 Rxg4 Qxg4 30 Rg5+ Qxg5 31 Nxg5 with a marginally better ending for White, I.Markovic-A.Payen, Singapore 1990.



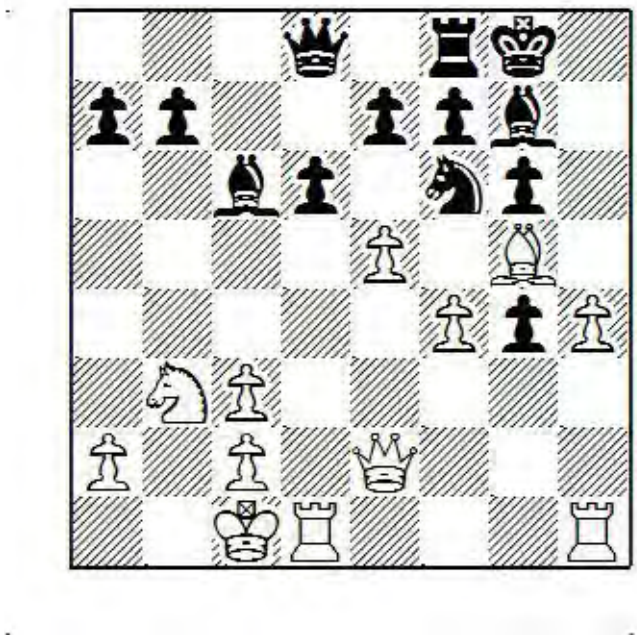
However, this is difficult to hold in practical play and not surprisingly, White has won the majority in tournament praxis.

a212) 18 ... exf6 19 exf5 (19 Bxc4 was played in M.Tseitlin-B.Alterman, Beersheba 1991, and now 19 ... bxc4 20 exf5 Rxf5 21 Qxg4 Rf1 22 Qg2 Rxh1 23 Rxh1 Kh8 would leave us with a wonderfully complex position, where Black should not be worse) 19 ... Bh6+ 20 Kb1 Ne3 21 Rdg1 Rxf5 (also interesting is 21 ... Kh7 22 Nd1 Nxf5 23 Qd3 Kh8 24 Rxg4 a5 25 Rf1 Qc8 26 Qf3 Rg8 when Black's activity makes up for the flawed pawn structure and somewhat loose king position) 22 Nxf5 Bxf5 23 Nd5 Re8 24 Nxe3 Rxe3 25 Qxb5 Re5 with chances to both sides, E.Fernandez Auado-A.Martin, Catalunya 1992.

a22) 17 ... Qa5 18 Bxf6 (or 18 fxg6 Nxb2 19 gxf7+ Rxf7 20 Kxb2 Qxc3+ 21 Kb1, L.Gofshtein-A.Mestel, Hastings 1991, and now Black could have won with 21 ... Nd5! 22 Qd2 Qxd2 23 Bxd2 Bxd4 24 Bxd5 e6 25 Be1 Bf2) 18 ... Bxf6 19 Qxg4 Kg7 20 Rh3, I.Morovic Fernandez-Ki.Georgiev, Las Palmas 1993, and now 20 ... b4 21 Nd5 Rxd5 22 exd5 Nxb2 23 Rdh1 Qa3 gives sharp play and balanced chances.

a3) 17 e5?! dxe5 18 Ndxb5 Nxb2 19 Kxb2 Qa5 20 Rxd7 Nxd7 21 Bxe7 was played in H.Westerinen-A.Mestel, Esbjerg 1979, and now Black's best would have been 21 ... exf4 22 Bxc5 Nxc5 23 h5 Nxb3 24 axb3 a6 and Black is winning.

b) A far less common option is 16 ... Na5!? which my computer is absolutely enchanted with. After 17 e5 (on 17 Qd3, the computer likes 17 ... Nxb3+ 18 Nxb3 Rxc3 19 bxc3 Qc7 and suggests a clear advantage for Black) 17 ... Nxb3+! (Black can also consider 17 ... Qc8!? 18 h5? (18 exf6 exf6 is still worse for White though) 18 ... Nxh5 19 Bxe7 dxe5 20 Ne4 exd4 21 Bxc5 Nxb3+ 22 axb3 Re8 23 Bxd4 Bf5 24 Be5 Bxe5 25 fxe5 Rxe5 and White is completely lost, V.Litvinov-D.Lobzhanidze, Minsk 1998) 18 Nxb3 Rxc3! 19 bxc3 Bc6.



Question: How do you assess this position?

Answer: Although Black is the exchange down (nothing special really in the Dragon), White's pieces are quite ineffective in this position. White's kingside attack has been stifled and now Black's long diagonal control and minor pieces threaten to dominate (with ... Ne4 or ... Nd5 ideas). White also has to take extra care not to free up the Dragon bishop. So in essence, Black already has the upper hand and White's defensive task is arduous.

After 20 Rhf1 Ne4!? (20 ... Qc8 led Black to win after 21 Qd3 (better is 21 Bxf6 exf6 22 exd6 f5 though Black has better chances) 21 ... Nd5 22 exd6 exd6 23 f5 gxf5 24 Rxf5 Nxc3 in G.Hernandez-D.Komljenovic, La Coruna 1993) 21 Qc4?! d5 22 Qxe4 dxe4 23 Rxd8 Rxd8 24 Bxe7 Rd7, the two passed pawns promises Black a substantial advantage, I.Smirin-V.Ivanchuk, Paris (rapid) 1994.

17 Bxf6!?

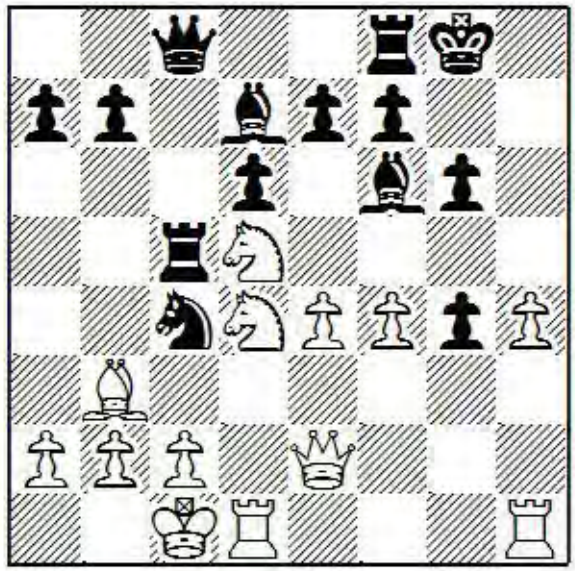
This is clearly White's best option. The two breaks work against White:

a) 17 f5 Nxb2! (17 ... e5 is playable but not nearly as good with 18 Ndb5 Bxb5 19 Nxb5 Rxb5 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Bxc4 Rb4 22 Bd5 gxf5 23 Rdf1 f4 giving a wonderfully unbalanced position, L.Yudasin-S.Tiviakov, Groningen 1993) 18 Bxf6? (18 Kxb2 Rxc3 19 fxg6 Rxb3+ 20 axb3 fxg6 is correctly given by several annotators as better for Black) 18 ... Nxd1 19 Qxg4 (or 19 Bxg7 Nxc3 20 Qxg4 Kxg7 21 h5 and here Black should have played 21 ... g5! 22 Qxg5+ Kh7 23 Bxf7 Rxf7 24 Qg6+ Kh8 25 Qxf7 Qe8 26 Qg6 Qf8 and White's attack is out of steam) 19 ... exf6 20 Rg1 (20 Qxg6 looks dangerous only until Black blocks the b3-g8 diagonal with 20 ... Rc4 and White is hopelessly lost) 20 ... Rc4! 21 Nxd1 d5! 22 h5 Rxd4 23 hxg6 fxg6 24 Qxg6 Rf7 and Black is a rook up with White's threats running out, L.Oll-V.Topalov, Moscow 1994.

b) 17 h5 looks sharp and threatening as well, but is nothing to worry about for Black after 17 ... Nxh5

18 Nd5 Rxd5! 19 exd5 b5 (19 ... Na5!? is also very good) 20 Bxc4 bxc4 21 Qxe7 Re8 22 Nf5 Bxf5 23 Qxd6 Qb7 and White resigned, S.Grover-B.Smith, Paleochora 2009. The threat against the b2-pawn costs White a boat-load of material.

17 ... Bxf6 18 Nd5



The point of White's trade on f6. This knight sally seems to speed up White's attack by threatening Nxf6+ at some point since the f6-bishop cannot leave its post.

Question: How does Black deal with this knight incursion?

White's other options:

a) 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 Nd5 Re8 (or 19 ... Qc5! 20 Nxf6+ exf6 21 Nb3 as in A.Abdulla-A.Al Sulaiti, Dubai 1996, and here 21 ... Qc6 22 Rhe1 Rc8 23 Rd2 Qa4 24 Kb1 Re8 is just very good for Black) 20 h5 (20 e5 Bg7 21 h5 Rc5 leads to a complicated position that should be okay for Black, but the lines are terribly long and very, very complicated) 20 ... g5 21 e5 Rc5 22 Qe4 was played in I.Almasi-A.Payen, Budapest 1991 and now 22 ... dxe5 23 fxe5 Bc6! is very good for Black as after 24 Nb3 Rxd5 25 Rxd5 Bxd5 26 Qxd5 Qf5 27 Re1 e6 28 Qxb7 Bxe5 29 Kb1 Rd8, White is clearly in trouble.

b) An interesting alternative is 18 h5 g3 19 Rd3 Bg4 20 Qg2, R.Gericke-U.Coy, correspondence 2007, and now Vigorito gives 20 ... Nxb2 as a winning move for Black, but things are not as simple or as good for Black as Vigorito indicates. For instance, 20 ... Rxh5! is a clear improvement with 21 Rxh5 gxh5 22 Nd5 Re8 23 Qxg3 b5 with a complicated game and chances to both sides) 21 Rxg3! Rxc3 22 hxg6! (now Black is losing though Vigorito only mentioned 22 Rxg4 Rxb3 23 axb3, and here he gave 23 ... Bxd4 which is another error, but he may just have switched this and 23 ... Nd3+ 24.Kd2 Bxd4 around, as this is clearly better for Black) 22 ... Nd3+ (22 ... Rxb3 23 Qh2 Bh3 24 axb3 fxg6 25 Rxh3 also wins for White) 23 Rxd3 Rxd3 24 f5! Rxb3 25 Qxg4! and it is completely game over for Black.

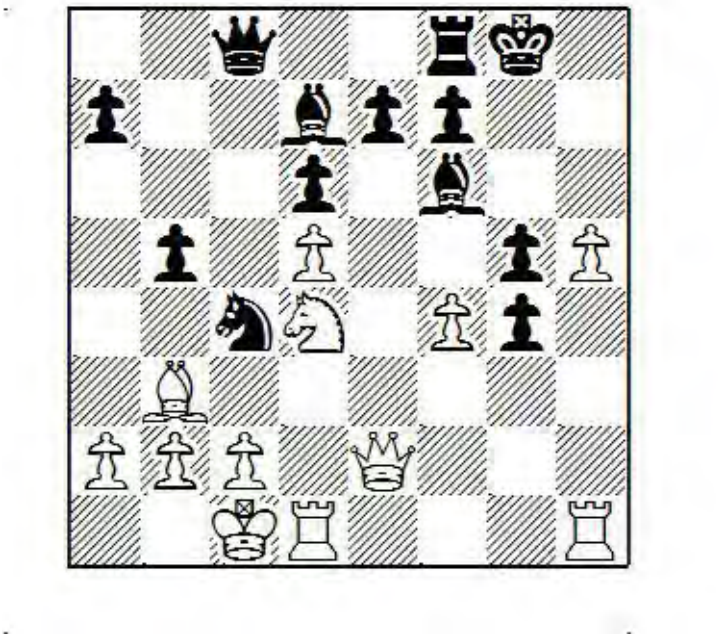
18 ... Rxd5!?

Answer: By exacting a pretty standard exchange sacrifice in the Soltis Variation (almost as common as the c3-exchange sacrifice), Black gains strong counterplay. With the d5-knight off the board, a considerable amount of White's dynamic play disappears and the b3-bishop can only stare in the neck of the d5-pawn. Furthermore, the c4-knight will gain in strength.

Black can also do without the immediate exchange sacrifice and play 18 ... b5 19 Nxf6+?! (19 h5 g5 20 Nxf6+ exf6 is similar to the game but after 19 c3, Black will likely have to resort to 19 ... Rxd5 20 exd5 Qc5 with an interesting game and chances to both sides) 19 ... exf6 20 h5 g5 (20 ... Rxh5! is better) 21 Qf2 Qd8 22 h6 Qe7 and Black has the somewhat better chances, but obviously things are still very

complicated, I.Kazarova-V.Krasilnikov, Ekaterinburg 1997.

19 exd5 b5 20 h5 g5



We have seen this idea several times throughout the book, Black denies White the opening of the h-file by sending the g-pawn one step forward.

21 fxg5 Bxg5+ 22 Kb1

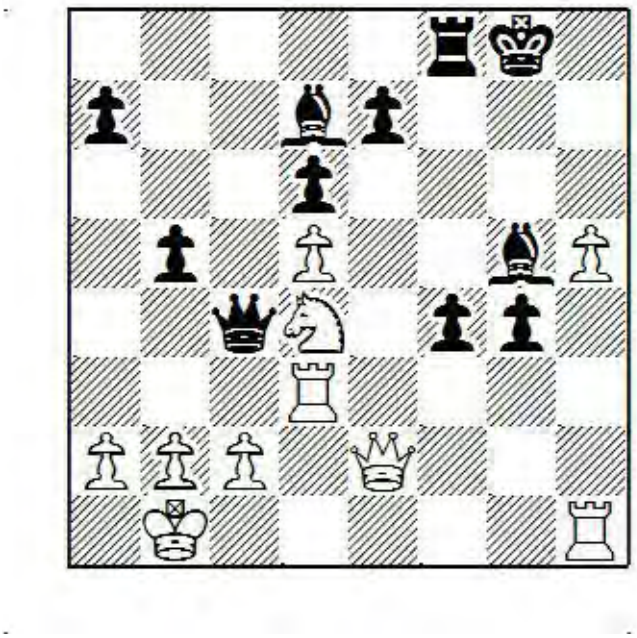
This is the kind of position Black should not be afraid of entering if he is playing the Soltis Variation or the Dragon Variation for that matter. At present, White's attack is at a standstill whereas Black has the bishop pair and potentially a couple of nasty connected passed pawns. However, Black has to keep in mind that pushing the pawns on the kingside bears an element of risk, weakening the shelter every time. Well, at least we have an interesting battle ahead of us.

22 ... f5 23 Rd3?!

Here Vigorito gives 23 h6 f4 24 Ne6 Bxe6 25 dxe6 Ne3 26 Rxd6 Qa8 which he assesses as unclear and that is no exaggeration.

23 ... f4 24 Bxc4 Qxc4 0-1

Here Ivanchuk decided to resign, which must have come as a total surprise for Topalov. Obviously Black has excellent compensation for the exchange with a pawn, the bishop pair, and two connected passed pawns. But even so, White is hardly lost.



After 24 ... Qxc4, White can try the following:

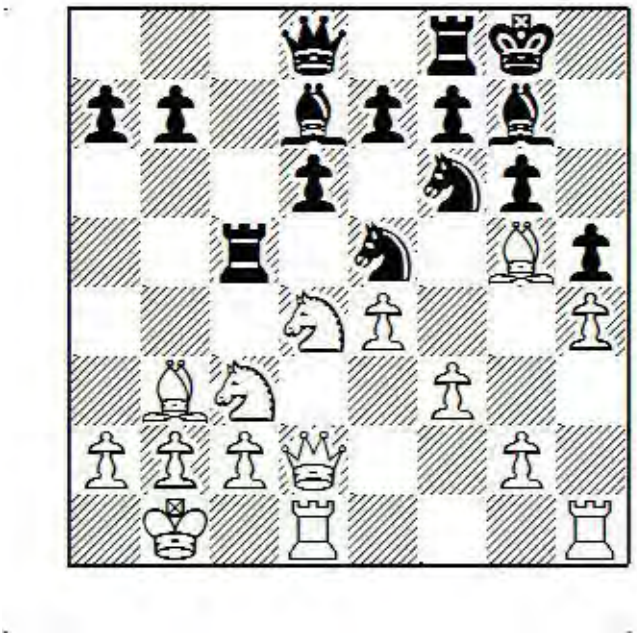
a) 25 Rg1 f3 26 Qf2 Qc5 followed by ... Rf4 is not at all pleasant for White.

b) 25 Qd1 f3 promises Black a solid advantage.

c) 25 Qg2 looks best, as for starters, it prevents ... f4-f3 and with that option gone, it is difficult to point Black to a great move. For instance, after 25 ... Kh8!? 26 Re1 (26 Qe4? loses on the spot to 26 ... Bf5 because of the pin on the knight. while 26 b3 Qc5 27 Rf1 Rc8 28 Rdd1 b4 with a nice hold on the dark squares, is somewhat better for Black, but not by much) 26 ... b4! (to prevent White from any Rc3 options) 27 b3 Qc5 28 Ne6 (28 Re6 Rg8 29 Rg6 Rxg6 30 hxg6 Kg7 31 Qh1 Kxg6 32 Qe4+ Kg7 and Black has the better chances, but there is still some way to go before White is actually lost) 28 ... Bxe6 29 Rxe6 g3 (even though this position is assessed as better for Black by the computer, things are still far from easy for Black). Here, one, admittedly very long line runs 30 Rg6 f3!! 31 Qxg3 Be3 32 Rd1 f2 33 Rf1 Qc3 34 Re6 Rg8 35 Qxe3 Qxe3 36 Rxe3 Rg1 37 Kb2 Rxf1 38 Rf3 Kg7 39 a3! bxa3+ 40 Ka2 Kh6 41 Rf5 Kg7 42 Rf4 and making progress for Black isn't easy.

Game 55
T.Radjabov-M.Carlsen
Baku 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 Bb3 Rc8 11 h4 h5 12 0-0-0 Ne5 13 Bg5 Rc5 14 Kb1!?



Question: Why does White feel the need to play this move without even being threatened?

Answer: As we have already seen earlier in this chapter, it is often useful to prepare for what is about to come in order to stave off some of the worst threats. Prophylaxis, so to speak. White will also make the claim that it is difficult for Black to make a similarly useful move without conceding weaknesses. In fact, this has been Black's biggest problem in this particular variation. Furthermore in regards to Kb1, we will see White employing it even earlier, also causing Black some degree of headaches.

14 ... Re8!

Question: What is the meaning of this move? The e-file certainly is not about to be opened.

Answer: This strange-looking move has been found to be Black's most useful move in this line if Black does not want to commit to 14 ... b5. The e-file is certainly not about to be opened, but in many lines, White plays Nd5 and then it makes good sense to have the e-pawn overprotected.

Question: What about the f7-pawn? Has that not been by this move?

Answer: A very good point. In fact, in this line with 14 Kb1, White, more than any other line in the Dragon than I can think of, plays Bxf7+, so Black certainly has to be careful. So the answer to the question is yes, it has been weakened.

In Game 56, 14 ... b5 will be covered.

15 g4?!

This all-in attack is certainly not White's best continuation, but apparently after the game, Radjabov admitted to having mixed up some lines. I guess it is nice to know that even the strongest players in the world can fall prey to such problems, even in a position where he hardly would have had to think up to this point. White has several interesting alternatives:

a) 15 Rhe1 is one of the more common moves here:

a1) 15 ... Qc8 16 Bh6 (16 Nde2 is another prophylactic move, but in this case it is hardly causing Black any undue worry after 16 ... b5 17 a3 as played in Z.Almasi-S.Berndt, Austria 1999, and now 17 ... Nc4 18 Bxc4 bxc4 (followed by ... Qb7 or ... Qb8) looks comfortable for Black) 16 ... Bxh6 17 Qxh6 Rxc3 18 bxc3 Qxc3 19 Re3 Qb4 20 c3 Qb6 21 Ka1 was played in A.Grischuk-A.Giri, Beijing 2013, and here 21 ... e6 (blunting the b3-bishop) 22 g4 a5 leaves the game wonderfully complex with chances to both sides.

a2) 15 ... b5 transposes to Game 56, which goes by the 14 ... b5 15 Rhe1 Re8 move order.

a3) 15 ... Qa5 16 f4 (16 a3 Qa6! (16 ... b5?! 17 Bxf6! exf6 18 Nde2 Rc6 19 Nd5 Qxd2 20 Rxd2 Nc4 21 Bxc4 bxc4 22 Red1 f5 23 exf5 Bxf5 24 Nd4 was very comfortable for White in V.Anand-G.Kasparov, PCA World Ch match (Game 17), New York 1995) 17 f4 Nc4 after which Black can be quite satisfied) 16 ... Nc4 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Nb3 (Golubev offers 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Nd5 Qxd2 20 Nxf6+ exf6 21 Rxd2 f5 with even chances) 18 ... Qa6 19 e5 Nh7 20 exd6 Nxg5 21 hxg5, V.Bologan-M.Golubev, Eforie Nord 2000, and here Black should have played 21 ... Bxc3 22 bxc3 exd6 23 Rxe8+ Bxe8 with approximately even chances.

b) 15 Bh6!? and now:

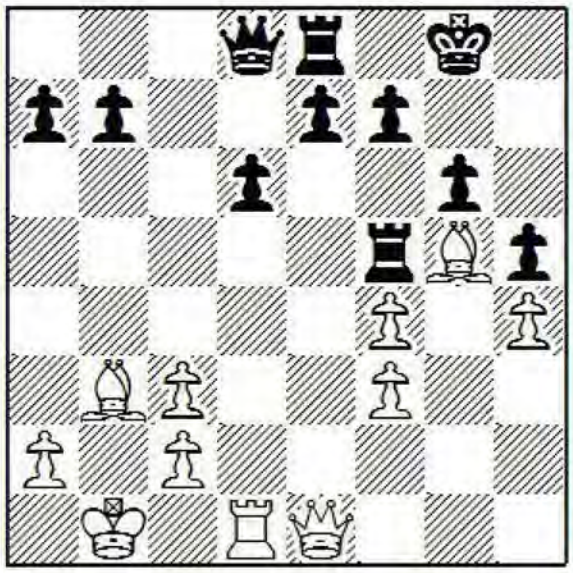
b1) 15 ... Bh8?! 16 g4 Qa5 (16 ... Nc4 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 gxh5 Nxh5 19 Be3 is uncomfortable for Black) 17 g5 Nh7 18 f4 Nc4 19 Qd3 Na3+ 20 Kc1 e6? was played in Z.Almasi-M.Golubev, Germany 2003, and now 21 f5!? crashes through for White.

b2) 15 ... a5 16 a4 Qb6 17 g4 Rxc3 18 bxc3 Nxf3 19 Nxf3 Nxe4 20 Qd3 Nxc3+ 21 Kc1 Bxh6+ 22 Ng5 Bg7 23 Rdf1 (23 Bxf7+ Kh8 24 Qxg6 Qe3+ 25 Kb2 Nxd1+ 26 Ka2 Nc3+ is just a draw) 23 ... d5 24 Rxf7 Qd4 25 gxh5 Qxd3 26 cxd3 gxh5 with a very complex position that provides both sides approximately even amount of chances, S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen, Dubai 2014.

b3) 15 ... Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 g4 is dangerous for Black and after 18 ... hxg4 19 h5 Rh8 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 b3 Rc5 22 fxg4 Bxg4 23 Nd5 Nxd5 24 exd5 Rxd5 25 Rhg1 Qd7 26 Qg2 Rg5 27 Nf3 Bxf3 28 Qxg5 Qe6, while White definitely holds the initiative, Black should be able to stay in the game, D.Swiercz-Lu Shanglei, Golden Sands 2012.

c) 15 f4 Nc4 16 Qd3:

c1) 16 ... Ng4 17 Bxc4 Nf2 18 Qe2 Nxh1 19 Bb3 Bg4 20 Nf3 Ng3 21 Qe1 Bxc3 22 bxc3 Bxf3 23 gxf3 Nf5 24 exf5 Rxf5 is interesting.



White has two bishops against a rook and pawn, but the g5-bishop is very isolated and can easily become a liability. The computer likes White a little better, but Black ended up winning the game in Zhao Jun-Lu Shanglei, Tianjin 2011.

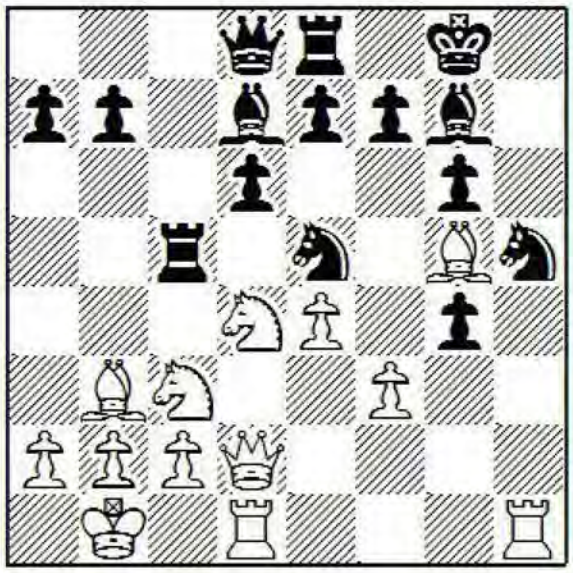
c2) 16 ... Qc8 17 f5 (17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 Nd5 Bg7 illustrates the benefit of having the rook on e8) 17 ... gxf5! 18 exf5 (18 Nxf5? is swiftly punished with 18 ... Nxb2! 19 Kxb2 Bxf5 20 exf5 Rxc3 21 Qxc3 Ne4 and it is curtains for White) 18 ... Ne5 19 Qe2 Neg4 (19 ... Rxc3?! is tempting but not very good as after 20 bxc3 Qxc3? 21 Rh3 Qc5 22 Bxf6 Bxf6 23 Qxh5, it is game over) 20 Rhf1 Rxc3! (with the knight on g4, the black kingside is safely under control and Black now has time to strike against White's king in the traditional Dragon fashion) 21 bxc3 Qxc3 22 Bc1 a5 23 Bb2 Qe3 24 Rde1 Qxe2 25 Rxe2 a4 and it seems clear that Black has enough compensation for the exchange in this unclear position, L.Dominguez Perez-T.Radjabov, Linares 2009.

d) 15 Nde2 is harmless as after 15 ... a5 16 f4 Neg4 17 e5 dxe5 18 fxe5 Nxe5 19 Nf4?! Qc8 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Ne4? (21 Nfd5 Bf5 22 Nxf6+ exf6 is also very good for Black, but not yet losing for White) 21 ... a4 22 Bd5 Bf5 23 Bxb7 Qxb7 24 Nxc5 Qb5, Black is completely winning, E.Berg-R.Winsnes, Sweden 2004.

15 ... hxg4 16 h5

White follows up aggressively, but this entire line is quite harmless for Black if he is decently prepared. On the other hand, 16 f4 has also been tested several times, but without impressive results. After 16 ... Nc4 17 Qe2!? (or 17 Qd3 Qc8 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 h5 g5! 20 Nd5?! gxf4 21 Nxf6+ exf6 22 Rdf1 d5 23 Rxf4 Rxe4 24 Rxf6 Qe8 25 Qd1?? Qe5 and it was game over in J.Rudd-G.Jones, Liverpool 2008) 17 ... Qc8 (another interesting try is 17 ... Na5!? 18 e5?! Nxb3 19 Nxb3 Rxc3 20 bxc3 Nh5 21 Rxd6 Qc8 22 Rxd7 Qxd7 23 Rd1 Qc8 24 Qd3 Kh7 intending ... f7-f6, promising Black a large advantage, Z.Vadla-B.Kutuzovic, Zadar 1997) 18 f5 Nxb2! 19 Kxb2 Rxc3 20 fxg6 Rxb3+ 21 axb3 fxg6 22 c3 Qc5 23 Rhe1 Rc8 and Black has the better chances, A.Nikolova-D.Vocaturo, Bratto 2009.

16 ... Nxh5



17 Rxh5?!

Now White is going all in, throwing all his chips on the card table.

White has also tried:

a) 17 f4 Nc4 18 Qd3 b5 19 e5 (19 f5 Qb6 is also very nice for Black) 19 ... Qc8! 20 Ne4 Rd5 21 Nc3 Bf5 (White's position is completely falling apart) 22 Nxd5 Bxd3 23 cxd3 dxe5 24 Nxb5 Na5 25 Ba4 and White resigned in Z.Severiukhina-V.Shinkevich, Kazan 2012.

b) 17 Bh6 e6! leads nowhere for White.

c) 17 Nd5 Rxd5! (the greedy 17 ... gxf3!? may in fact be even stronger) 18 Bxd5 Qb6 is a line given by Golubev with a better game for Black.

17 ... gxh5 18 Qh2

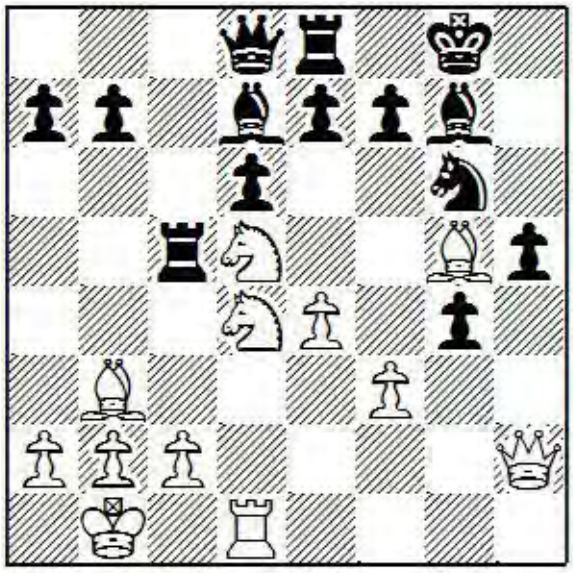
Instead 18 Nd5?! was successfully employed by a top young Dutch grandmaster and after 8 ... Rxd5?! (18 ... gxf3 is fine because Black can always stick a bishop on g4, effectively sealing up the kingside and 18 ... a5 19 a4 gxf3 is also very attractive) 19 Bxd5 Qb6 20 Bb3 as in A.Giri-J.Bosch, Netherlands 2011, now Black should have continued with 20 ... a5 21 a4 gxf3 22 Bh6 Bf6 23 Rg1+ Kh7! (intending ... Rg8) and White's attack is going exactly nowhere.

18 ... Ng6?!

Black takes White's attack a little too seriously. After the game, Radjabov mentioned the alternative 18 ... Qb6!? 19 Qxh5 e6 which looks pleasant for Black. Alternatively, 18 ... Qa5!? 19 Qxh5 Ng6 transposes back to the game continuation.

19 Qxh5

Question: On 19 Nd5, what is the simplest way for Black to douse White's initiative?

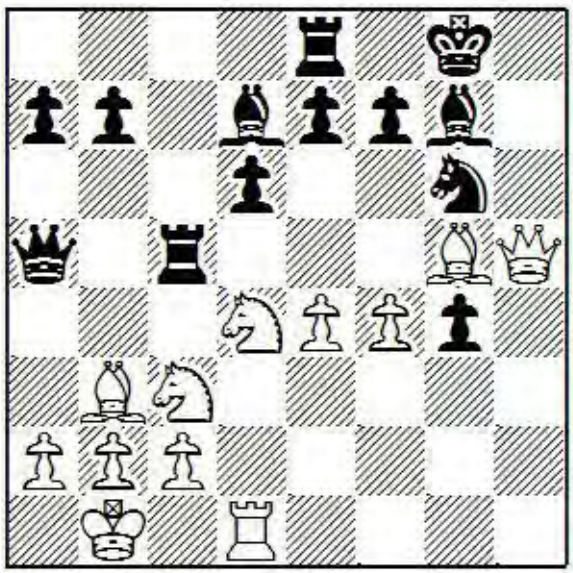


Answer: Black should just play the 19 ... Rxd5! exchange sacrifice. Although this is not the favourite move of my computer, it is so straightforward and typical of the Dragon that I will not even bother with the alternatives which are terribly complicated and not all logical. After 20 Bxd5 Qb6 21 c3 e6 22 Bb3 a5 23 fxg4 h4 24 Be3 a4 25 Bc2 a3, Black is much better, P.Enders-Cao Sang, Budapest 1995.

19 ... Qa5!?

Black can also play another standard Dragon sacrifice 19 ... Rxg5 20 Qxg5 e6 21 Qxg4 Qf6 22 Qg3 (22 Nce2 Qh4 is about equal) 22 ... Qe5 23 Qxe5 Bxe5 24 Nce2 Kg7 25 Rg1 Kf6 26 c3 Rh8 and Black is clearly better in the endgame thanks to his dark-squared control, T.Glimbrant-M.Pavlovic, Barbera del Valles 1994.

20 f4!



A powerful response. Now White threatens to prise open the Black king's cover with Bxf7+ and f4-f5 ideas. Instead, 20 Qxg6? is met by 20 ... e6 and Black wins White's g5-bishop and will hold a decisive advantage.

20 ... Rxg5

If Black is playing for a win, then 20 ... Rxc3 is not the way to go as now White has, as previously mentioned, can hit back with 21 bxc3 Qxc3 22 Bxf7+ Kxf7 23 f5 and a draw is very likely, for instance, after 23 ... Qb4+ 24 Kc1 Qa3+ 25 Kb1 Kf8 26 Bh6 Ne5 27 Bxg7+ Kxg7 28 Qg5+ Kf7 29 Qh5+ with a perpetual check.

21 fxg5 e6 22 Nf5?

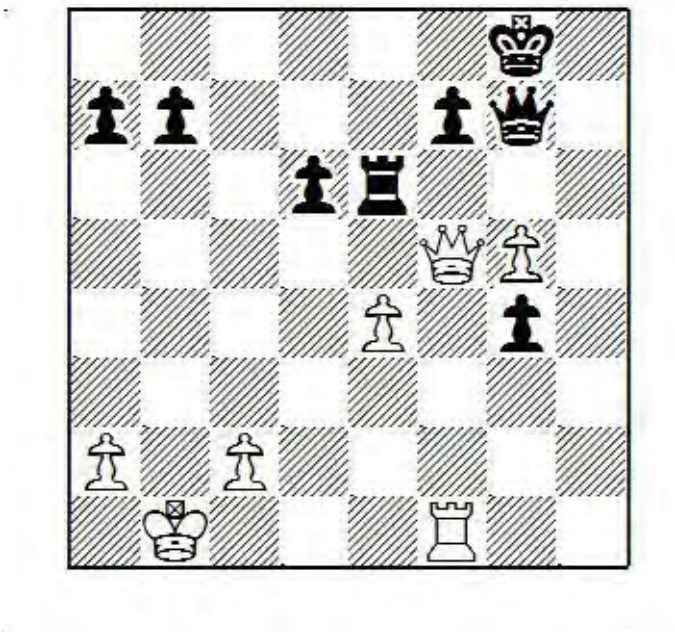
White tries to complicate matters, hoping that the sharper position will throw his opponent off the track. A far better choice is 22 Qxg4, keeping White in the game, for example after 22 ... Qc5 23 Nde2 a5 24 a4 b5 with the initiative and better pawn structure for Black.

22 ... exf5 23 Qxg6

The point behind the previous move. The diagonal for the b3-bishop has once again been opened. However, White's concept is easily dealt with.

23 ... Be6 24 Qh5

Or 24 Bxe6 Rxe6 25 Qxf5 Bxc3! 26 bxc3 Qb6+ 27 Ka1 Qe3 28 Rf1 Qxc3+ 29 Kb1 Qg7, Black is clearly better.



In heavy piece endings, a safe king is paramount and right now White's king is far more exposed than Black's.

24 ... fxe4 25 Rf1

On 25 Nd5, Carlsen offered 25 ... e3! 26 g6 Kf8 27 gxf7 Bxf7 28 Rf1 Qe1+! 29 Rxe1 Bxh5 30 Rf1+ Bf7 31 Nxe3 Rxe3 32 Rxf7+ Ke8 and Black's g-pawn should help decide the game.

25 ... Qe5! 26 Rxf7 Bxb3

Simply better is 26 ... Rf8!, blowing out the candle that carries White's hopes of salvation.

27 axb3 g3 28 Ka2?!

Also on 28 Rxb7 Rf8 29 Qe2 Rf2!, Black wins without any issues on account of his passed pawns.

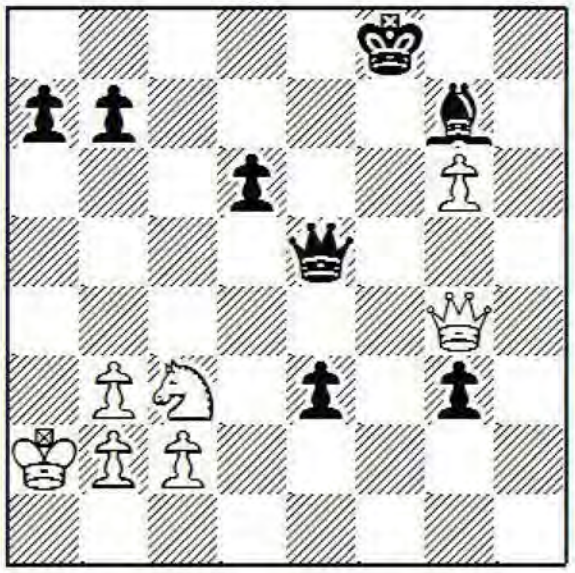
28 ... Rf8

Black can still throw away his advantage in one go with 28 ... g2?. White should play 29 Rxb7 Qa5+ 30 Na4 Rf8 31 Qg4 Qd5 32 Rc7 e3 33 g6 Rf1 34 Rc8+ Rf8 35 Rc7 Rf1 with a repetition of moves.

29 Rxf8+ Kxf8 30 Qg4 e3?!

The simplest continuation is 30 ... Ke7 31 Qc8 e3 32 Qxb7+ Ke6 33 Qc8+ Kf7 34 Qg4 Kg6, and Black is winning.

31 g6



31 ... e2?

This tosses the rest of the advantage away. After the correct 31 ... Bf6! 32 Qd7 Qe7 Black should win, e.g. 33 Qc8+ Kg7 34 Qh3 Bxc3 35 bxc3 Kxg6 36 Qxg3+ Kf7 37 Qf3+ Ke8 38 Qe2 Qe5, while it will still take a few more moves to convert, an active queen nearly always beats a passive queen like this one.

32 Qf3+?

Short on time and exhausted from an intense tactical game, White returns the favour and plays the losing move just as he had gotten back into the game. After the correct 32 Qd7! White miraculously holds the draw after 32 ... Kg8 (32 ... Qe7 allows an immediate perpetual check after 33 Qc8+ Qe8 34 Qf5+ Kg8 35 Qd5+ Kh8 36 Qh1+ Kg8 37 Qd5+) 33 Qc8+ Bf8 34 Qxb7 Be7 35 Qh1! Kf8 36 Qh7 (the constant mating threats keeps Black away from queening his pawns) 36 ... Ke8 37 Nxe2 Qa5+ 38 Kb1 Qe1+ 39 Ka2 Qa5+ with a perpetual check.

32 ... Ke8

Now Black is just winning. First of course, he has to get away from White's queen checks.

33 Qf7+ Kd8 34 Qg8+ Kd7 35 Qf7+ Qe7 36 Qf5+

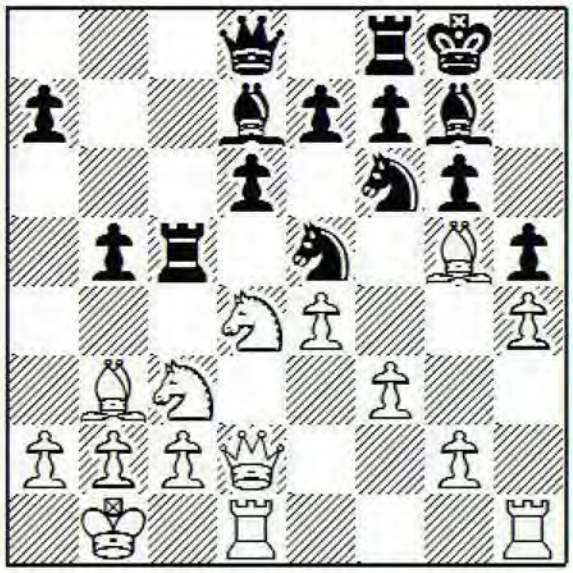
Also 36 Nxe2 Qxf7 37 gxf7 g2 (followed by ... Ke7 and ... Bd4) wins for Black.

36 ... Kd8 37 Qa5+ b6 38 Qd5 e1Q 39 Qa8+ Kd7 40 Qb7+ Ke8 0-1

With the time control reached, there is little left for White to do but to resign.

Game 56
Zhao Jun-Ma Qun
Ho Chi Minh City 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 h4 h5 11 Qd2 Rc8 12 0-0-0 Ne5 13 Bg5 Rc5 14 Kb1 b5



15 g4

The text move really gained popularity after Karpov used it to beat Sznapik at the 1986 Dubai Olympiad, but prior to that, it had actually seen action in games by Chandler, Short and Mestel. However, another, more positional, move also won some attention, particularly on account of Beliavsky who used it a couple of times at the traditional Tilburg tournament. This move was 15 Rhe1, with the idea of a quick f3-f4 and e4-e5 central hit:

a) 15 ... Re8 16 f4 Nc4 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 e5 Nh7! (18 ... b4? 19 Ncb5 Nd5 20 e6! should be better for White) 19 b3 Rc8 20 exd6 Nxg5 21 hxg5 Bg4?! (21 ... exd6!? 22 Rxe8+ Qxe8 23 Re1 Qd8 24 Nd5 Rc5 25 Ne7+ Kf8 looks playable for Black) 22 Ndxb5 Bxd1 23 d7 Bg4 24 dxc8Q and a draw was agreed in I.Morovic Fernandez-M.Petursson, Yerevan 1996, but White should be clearly better in the final position.

b) 15 ... a5 16 f4 Nc4 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 e5 b4 (18 ... Bg4 19 Bxf6 exf6 20 e6 was problematic for Black in A.Beliavsky-R.Huebner, Tilburg 1986) 19 Ncb5 dxe5 20 fxe5 (or 20 Nf3 Qc8 21 Na7 Qa6 22 fxe5 Bf5 23 exf6 Rxc2 24 Qxc2 Bxc2+ 25 Kxc2 exf6 26 Be3 Ra8 and Black is clearly better, M.Santo Roman-M.Marin, Belfort 1995) 20 ... Nd5 21 Nd6?? (White should have played 21 e6!? Bxb5 22 exf7+ Rxf7 23 Nxb5 Rc5 24 Nd4 Nc3+ 25 bxc3 bxc3 26 Qd3 Rd5 27 Qxg6 Rxd4 28 Rxd4 Qxd4 29 Qe6 which would have kept in the game) 21 ... Nc3+ 22 bxc3 bxc3 23 Qd3 Rxd4 and White resigned in C.Florescu-D.Rogozenco, Sovata 2001.

15 ... a5

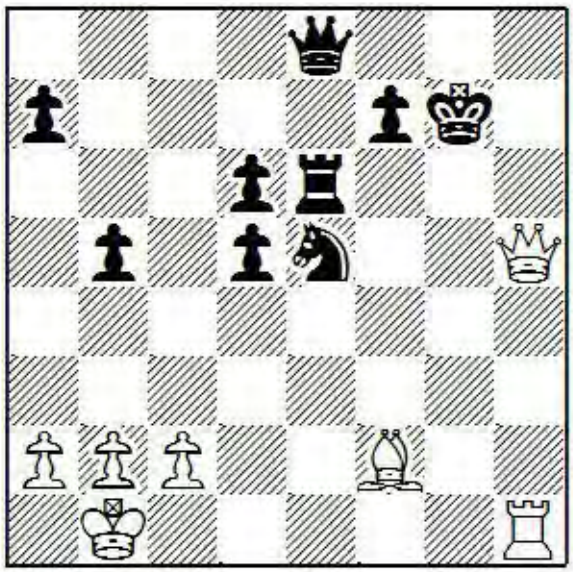
Question: Normally, we take the offered g4-pawn. So why do we not do that here?

Answer: You can take it, as we will cover below, but it is quite dangerous.

After 15 ... hxg4 16 h5, Black really has two options available:

a) 16 ... Nxh5 was considered dubious after the aforementioned Karpov game, but now appears to be able to hold pieces together after 17 Nd5 Re8 (not 17 ... Nf6? 18 Nxf6+ exf6 19 Bh6 Bh8 20 Bxf8 Qxf8 21 Qh2 Qg7 22 f4 Nc4 23 f5 Re5 24 Bxc4 bxc4 25 Rdg1 and Black's position is an unenviable heap of rubbish) 18 Rxh5 gxh5 19 Qh2 Rxd5 20 Bxd5 gxf3 21 Qxh5 f2 22 Nf5 Bxf5 23 exf5 Qd7 24 Bh4 e6 25 f6 exd5 26 fxg7 Kxg7 27 Bxf2 Re6 28 Rh1 Qe8 as played in Wan Yunguo-Lu Shanglei, Taizhou 2014 *(see following diagram)*.

Black is up in material but his pawns are messed up and his king is very open. Nevertheless, he managed to draw this game.



b) Another attempt for Black is 16 ... Rxc3 17 bxc3 Nxf3! (the point behind the c3-exchange sacrifice) 18 Nxf3 Nxe4 19 Qh2 (19 Qe3 Nxc3+ 20 Kc1 gxf3 21 Rd3 Qa5 22 h6 is better for White but still very, very complicated) 19 ... Nxc3+ 20 Kc1 Qa5 21 hxg6 Nxa2+ 22 Bxa2 Qa3+ 23 Kd2 Qc3+ 24 Kc1 Qa3+ and a draw was agreed in Z.Lanka-I.Smirin, Soviet Union 1989.

16 gxh5

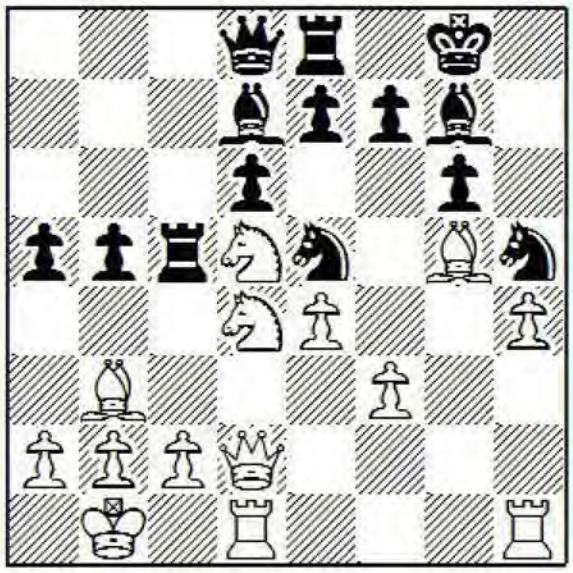
Another possibility is 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 gxh5 a4 18 Bd5 e6 19 hxg6 exd5 20 h5 Bg5 21 f4 Nc4 22 Qh2 Bf6 23 Qg3 Bxd4 24 Rxd4 Qf6, Wan Yunguo-B.Dastan, Albena 2012, which the computer evaluates as even on account of 25 gxf7+ Kxf7 26 e5 Qf5 27 Rg1 dxe5 28 fxe5 Ke8 29 e6 Bxe6 30 Qb8+ Kd7 31 Rg7+ Rf7 32 Qb7+ Rc7 33 Qxb5+ Ke7 34 Rg1 followed by queen checks on the b-file.

16 ... a4

Question: Although I like the idea of just pushing the pawns forward, would it not be safer to recapture on h5 with the knight?

Answer: Safe is a relative term in this variation, but it is possible to recapture on h5 with the knight as we will discuss below. Pushing the pawn to a4 has long been determined to be the critical move.

The recapture 16 ... Nxh5 is supposed to be less reliable than the text move. However, after 17 Nd5 Re8, Black has been doing okay theoretically:



a) 18 Nf4 is the sharpest, and now:

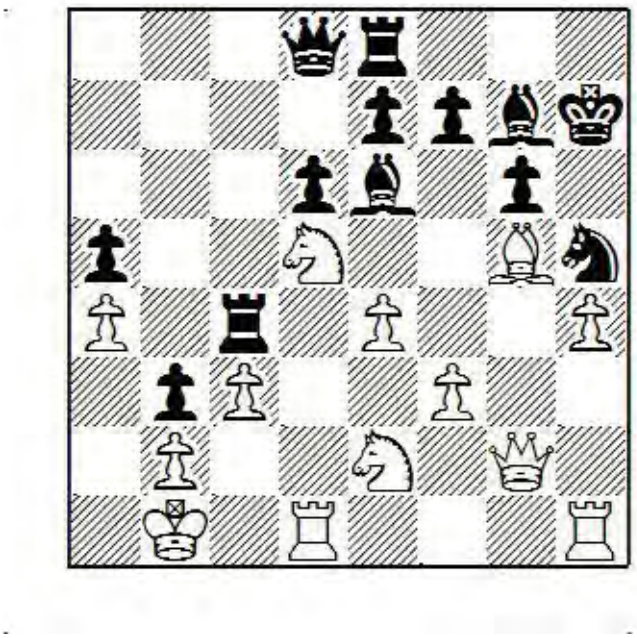
a1) 18 ... a4 19 Bd5 (19 Nxh5 axb3 20 Nxb3 Nc4 21 Qe1 Bxb2 22 Nxc5 dxc5 should be fine for Black) 19 ... Nc4 20 Bxc4 bxc4 21 Nxh5 c3 22 Qe3 Qb6 23 b3 gxh5 24 Bh6 Bf6 25 Bg5 Bg7 26 Bh6 Bf6 27 Rhg1+ Kh7 reaches a complicated position with approximately even chances, although I would probably prefer Black, A.Areshchenko-F.Corrales Jimenez, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009. Although the black king looks somewhat precariously placed on the h-file, he is actually quite safe.

a2) 18 ... Nxf4 19 Qxf4 Nc4 and here:

a21) 20 h5 f6 21 hxg6? (21 Bxf6 exf6 22 Qxd6 Qe7 23 Qxe7 Rxe7 24 hxg6 a4 25 Bxc4+ bxc4 26 Rh4 c3 27 bxc3 Re8 gives Black has the much better chances, B.Lanin-J.Miller, correspondence 2000) 21 ... Rxg5 22 Qh4 Kf8 (22 ... a4! is even more convincing) 23 f4 Rg4 24 Qh5 was K.Kulaots-D.Rogozenco, Chemnitz 1997, and now 24 ... Qc8! 25 Nxb5 a4! 26 Bxa4 Qb7! just wins for Black.

a22) 20 Qg3 a4 21 Bxc4 bxc4 22 h5 (22 c3? runs into 22 ... a3 and White's queenside pawn shield collapses rapidly, M.Erdogdu-S.Cifka, Pardubice 2008) 22 ... Qa5 23 Bd2! (23 Rhg1? loses after 23 ... Rb8 24 hxg6 f6! 25 Bc1 c3 (25 ... a3! is even stronger) 26 b3 axb3 27 cxb3 c2+ 28 Nxc2 Rxc2 29 Kxc2 Qxa2+ 30 Bb2 Rc8+ 31 Kd2 Qxb2+ 32 Ke3 Rc3+ 33 Rd3 Bh6+ 34 f4 Rxd3+ 35 Kxd3 Bb5+ 36 Ke3 Qe2+ 37 Kd4 Qd2+ with mate on the next move thus prompting resignation, D.Dragicevic-R.Polzin, Pardubice 2008) 23 ... c3 (23 ... Qb6 loses to 24 hxg6) 24 Bxc3 Rxc3 25 hxg6 was tried in A.Motylev-S.Feller, Ohrid 2009, and here Rogozenco gives 25 ... Qe5 26 gxf7+ Kxf7 27 Qxe5 dxe5 28 bxc3 exd4 29 cxd4 a3 as Black's best option. White has rook and three central pawns for two bishops, but it is by no means certain that he will win.

b) 18 a3 Nc4 19 Qg2 (19 Qd3 Be6 20 Nxe6 fxe6 21 Nc3 Nxb2 22 Bxe6+ Kh7 23 Kxb2 Rxc3 wins for Black, Khin Thaung-W.Zaw, Yangon 1999) 19 ... Kh7 (19 ... Kf8!? 20 Rhg1 Qb8 looks like an improvement for Black) 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Ne2 b4 22 a4 was seen in K.Kulaots-T.Seeman, Vilnius 2014, and here Black should have tried 22 ... b3!? 23 c3 Be6.



There are interesting complications here and from here, I think the game might likely end with mate or perpetual check by either side.

17 h6

a) 17 Bxf7+ is an absolutely fascinating move, which blew my mind when I first saw in *Chess Informant*. However, Black should be okay after 17 ... Kxf7 18 hxg6+ Nxg6 19 h5 Ne5 20 Qg2 (or 20 h6 Nc4! 21 Qg2 Bh8 22 h7 Qa5 and Black has the better chances, B.Ivanovic-G.Kosanovic, Stara Pazova 1988) 20 ... Rg8 21 h6 Bh8 22 f4 Nc4 23 h7 Rg7 24 Nd5 a3 and Black is clearly better.

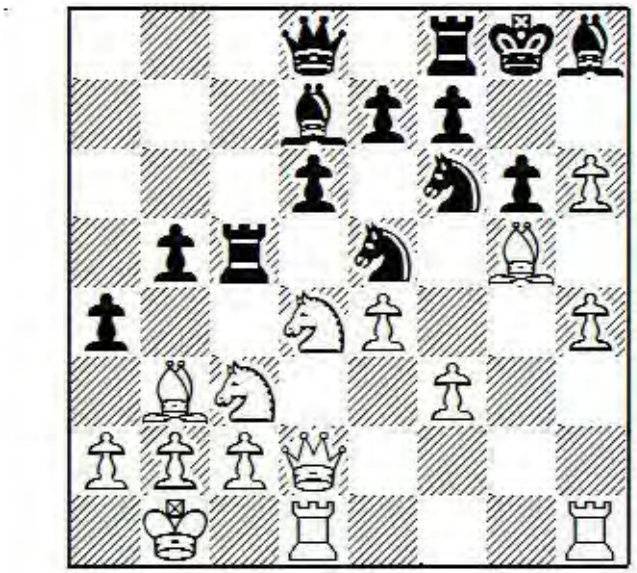
b) Another bishop move (aiming to save it) is 17 Bd5 and now:

b1) 17 ... b4 18 Nxa4! (18 Nce2? Nxd5 19 exd5 b3! and Black is in charge) 18 ... Rxd5 19 exd5 Qa5 is a total mess which the computer evaluates as equal!

b2) 17 ... e6?? loses instantly to 18 h6 Bh8 19 h7+ Kg7 20 h5 gxh5 21 Rxh5 and it is over for Black. C.Pfrommer-J.Palkovi, Germany 1992.

b3) 17 ... Nxh5 is the most solid option, and now 18 f4 Nc4 19 Bxc4 Rxc4 20 e5 was played in L.Christiansen-T.O'Donnell, Internet 2001, and here Black should simply have played 20 ... f6 with the better chances.

17 ... Bh8



18 h7+

Question: Why is White giving the pawn away for free?

Answer: To quote Rogozenco, "Getting rid of that pawn. White needs an open h-file, not pawns there" is the rationale of White's pawn toss. If White does not sacrifice the pawn, then Black will put his king on h7, in front of the pawn where it will be nearly untouchable.

One such example occurs if White plays 18 Bd5 and now 18 ... Kh7!? (18 ... b4 19 Nce2 Nxd5 20 h7+ Kxh7 21 h5 is very dangerous for Black) 19 Bxf6 (or 19 a3 Qb6 20 Ba2 b4 21 axb4 Qxb4 22 Bxf6 Nxf3 23 Nxf3 Bxf6 24 e5 Rb8 and Black's attack is gaining traction, M.Ulibin-S.Savchenko, Simferopol 1988) 19 ... Bxf6 20 f4 b4 (or 20 ... Nc4 21 Bxc4 bxc4 22 e5 dxe5 23 Nf3 Bc6 24 Qxd8 Rxd8 25 Rxd8 Bxf3 with a complicated endgame, which I would prefer playing Black) 21 Nce2 Rxd5 22 exd5 Nc4 23 Qxb4?! (23 Qd3!?) 23 ... Qc7 24 Qc3 Bg4 25 Rhe1 Rb8 26 b3 Qc5 27 Kc1?? axb3 28 cxb3 Qa3+ 29 Kb1 Bf5+ 30 Ka1 Qxa2+ and facing mate in a few moves, White chose to resign in T.Ernst-B.Alterman, Manila 1992.

18 ... Nxh7

Black cannot capture the pawn with the king with 18 ... Kxh7 19 h5 Kg8 (or 19 ... Nxh5 20 Rxh5+ gxh5 21 Qh2 with mate in nine according to the computer) 20 hxg6 and Black resigned in G.Todorovic-D.Brankovic, Kladovo 1996.

19 Bd5 b4

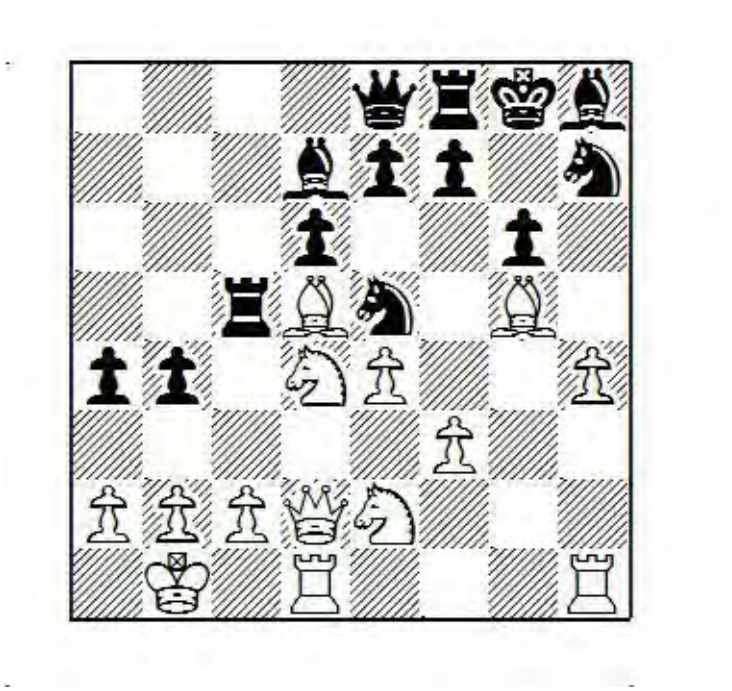
Black has also tried 19 ... Bg7, and now:

a) 20 f4?! is best met with 20 ... Nc4 21 Qh2 Bg4! (threatening ... Bxd1 and also putting a cork in the bottle in regards to White's dreams of playing h4-h5) 22 Bxc4 bxc4 23 Nd5 Rxd5 24 exd5 Bxd1 25 Rxd1 Qb6 and Black is readying himself to launch an assault on White's king.

b) 20 Be3 e6 (20 ... b4 21 Nce2 Nf6 looks fine for Black as well) 21 Nxe6 (White enters a position where he has rook and two pawns for two minor pieces) Bxe6 22 Bxc5 dxc5 23 Bxe6 (23 h5!? g5 24 Qg2 Qf6 is also very pleasant for Black) 23 ... Qxd2 24 Bxf7+ Rxf7 25 Rxd2 was played in P.Smirnov-M.Golubev, Izmir 2004 with better chances for Black.

c) As analysed by Golubev, White's best is probably 20 a3!? which stops ... b5-b4 and after 20 ... Nc4 21 Bxc4 bxc4 (or 21 ... Nxg5 22 hxg5 bxc4 23 Nd5) 22 Be3 Qa5 23 Nd5 Re8, White has small positional plus as the black pawns on the queenside are a bit of a problem in the long-term.

20 Nce2 Qe8!

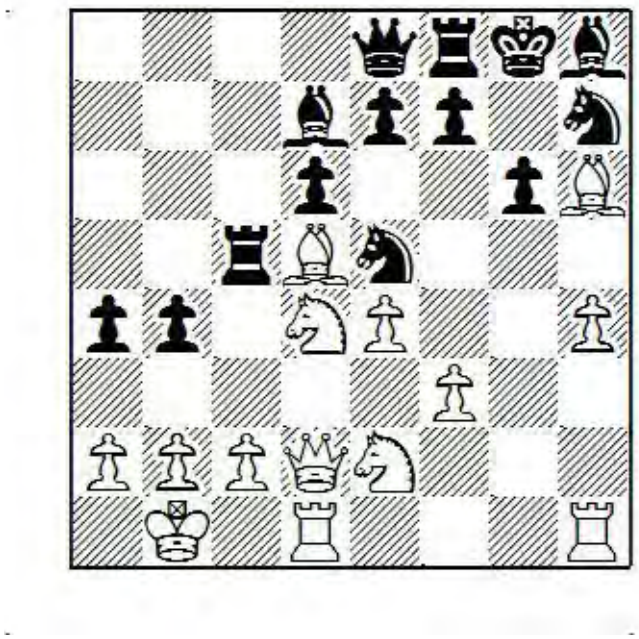


Question: Excuse me! This does not look Dragon-like at all. Is this really Black's best?

Answer: It actually seems to be the best move, even if it is not a typical Dragon one. Finding moves that are standard and normal are not that difficult. It is the unusual solutions that demand the greater applause, and this is one such move. By moving the queen off the d8-square,

Black prepares ... e7-e6, posting a challenge to White's d5-bishop that is struggling to find a safe haven.

21 Bh6



Exercise: What should Black play here?

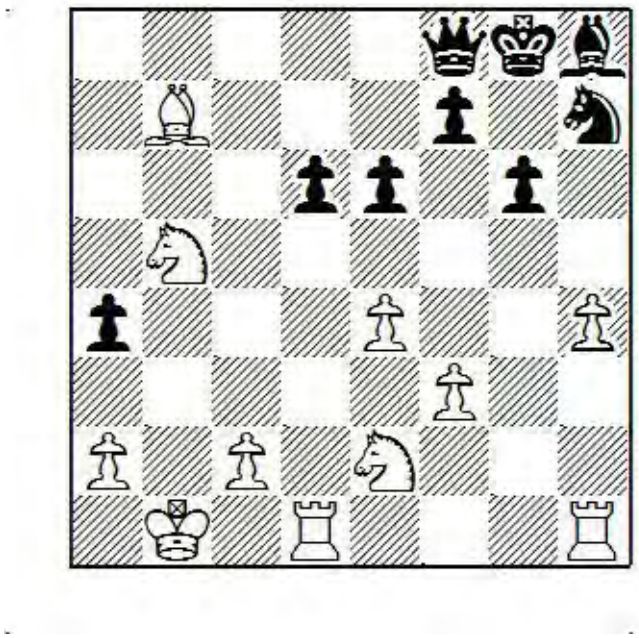
21 ... e6!

Answer: I hope you picked the text move, which would be an indication that you are getting a feel for the Dragon. Saving the exchange is not important, but sending the white light-squared bishop in a different direction is. Just for the sake of clarification then 21 ... Bg7? 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 h5 g5 24 f4 is absolutely horrible for Black.

22 Bxf8 Qxf8 23 Bb7

White saves the bishop, but enters a sequence of forced moves.

23 ... Nc4! 24 Qxb4 Nxb2! 25 Qxb2 Rb5! 26 Qxb5 Bxb5 27 Nxb5



27 ... Qb8?

Now Black gets himself into serious trouble. Instead, with the consistent 27 ... d5!, he would actually be doing very well indeed as after 28 a3 Qc5 29 c4 dxc4 30 Ba6 Qb6 31 Rd6 Qe3, the queen marches in to deliver the perpetual check.

28 Ba6?!

White could likely do better with 28 Bc6 Qb6 29 Rxd6 Be5 30 Rhd1 Kg7 31 a3, giving up the exchange, but leaving White with a sufficiently large material advantage.

28 ... d5 29 exd5 Qb6??

This loses, but of course for it to truly lose, White needs to play the best moves subsequently. Instead, 29 ... exd5 30 Rxd5 Qa8 31 Rhd1 Qxa6 32 h5 Qb7 would limit White's advantage to something more manageable.

30 d6?

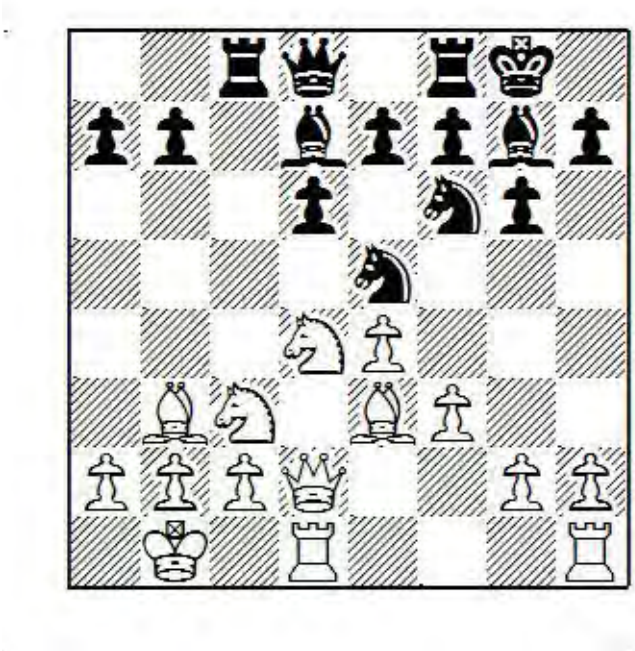
This position is a total mess and is not easy to navigate. The text move looks obviously like the winning move, but the computer disagrees and instead offers 30 dxe6 Qxe6 (or 30 ... Qxa6 31 Rd8+ Kg7 32 Ned4 Qa5 33 Rb8 Qb4+ 34 Kc1 fxe6 35 a3 and White can start working on consolidating his material advantage) 31 Nd6 Be5 32 Bc4 Qe7 33 h5 g5 34 Bxf7+ Kh8 35 Nc4 Bg7 36 h6 Bf8 37 Bd5 and White should be winning.

30 ... Qxa6 31 c4 0-1

Although we have just seen White throw the majority of his advantage away, he still retains a clear advantage at this juncture. However, the rest of the game is ridiculously complex and quite error-filled, and therefore I will spare you the torment of working your way through the rest, leave to say that Black managed to win.

Chapter Eleven
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: The Modern Variation – 12 Kb1

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1

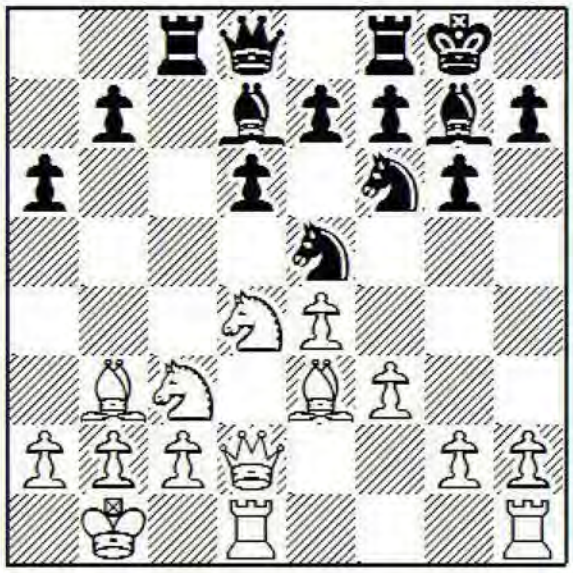


This innocent and harmless looking move has gone from being dismissed to occupying an important part of Dragon theory. In Gufeld & Stetsko's *The Complete Dragon*, which was written in 1997, the author duo wrote of 12 Kb1 "in a number of lines this is useful prophylactic move, but here it is premature". That is of course not the only mistake they made in that book, but this one was hard to predict. Their main line was based around a blitz game by Karpov from 1987. However, in the last half of the 1990s, the move started gaining traction and as the new millennium started, it got established as one of White's premier choices against the Dragon. One of the advantages for White is that it does not require an overwhelming amount of theoretical knowledge and it is also relatively easy to navigate the few lines that Black can play. For Black, the downside is that he does not get the type of play with which he is accustomed in the Dragon. He will have to play creatively not to end up in sterile positions where White can apply pressure as it suits him. That being said, Black is doing okay theoretically, so provided the follow-up is incorrect, he should be fine.

In the first game of this chapter, Game 57, we see the future World Champion, Magnus Carlsen play 12 ... a6. A logical alternative appears to be 12 ... Nc4, forcing the exchange of White's light-squared bishop, but after 13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 g4, Black has not doing well, theoretically. In Game 58, we look at why that is so. Another move that awaits the action is 12 ... Re8, trying to make a purposeful waiting move before White opens up for action. In Game 59, we see the sharp 13 h4 h5 14 g4 being tested, whereas the more balanced 14 Bh6 is the subject of Game 60.

Game 57
V.Topalov-M.Carlsen
Bilbao 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1 a6



The text move is an interesting interpretation of how to best meet White's prophylactic move. In Game 57, we will discuss the merits of 12 ... Nc4 while Games 59 and 60 will look at the other waiting move, 12 ... Re8.

In addition to these moves, Black has an amazing variety of choices available:

a) 12 ... a5 13 a4 (13 h4 b5 14 a3 a4 15 Ba2 Nc4 16 Bxc4 bxc4 with a complex position) 13 ... Nc4 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 b3 Rc8 (I have played 15 ... Rb4 myself, but it is not particularly good after 16 g4 Bc6 17 Ndb5?! (my opponent played 17 Na2! and only through some miracle was I able to win) 17 ... Nd7 18 Na2? Bxb5 19 Nxb4? axb4 20 axb5 Qa5 21 Bd4 was L.Gofshtein-J.Sorkin, Dos Hermanas 2003 and now 21 ... Ra8 decides) 16 Ncb5 (16 g4 Qc7 17 Ndb5 Nxe4! 18 Nxe4 Bxb5 19 axb5 d5 20 Nf2?! a4! and all of a sudden, Black's attack comes crashing through after 21 b6 Qc6 22 Rc1 axb3 23 c3 Ra8 24 Nd3 Qc4 25 Nb4 Qxb4 and White resigned in M.Cornette-T.Petrosyan, Heraklio 2002) 16 ... e5 17 Ne2 Bxb5 18 axb5 d5 19 exd5 a4 20 Qb4 axb3 21 Qxb3 Nd7 and Black has ample compensation for the pawn, W.Arencibia Rodriguez-A.Hoffman, Santa Clara 1994.

b) 12 ... b5 13 Ndxb5 (13 Ncxb5 is also possible) 13 ... a6 (or 13 ... Bxb5 14 Nxb5 a6 15 Nd4 Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 b3 Qb8 18 Ne2 Rfc8 19 Bd4?! (better is 19 Rc1 to avoid losing the c2-pawn) 19 ... d5 20 e5 Rxc2 21 Qxc2 Rxc2 22 Kxc2 Nd7 23 f4 e6 as played in S.Zhigalko-A.Tukhaev, Herceg Novi 2006 and Black has better chances due to White's exposed king) 14 Nd4 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 h4 Qb8 17 Nde2 Rfc8 18 Bd4 h5 19 Rc1 Rb4 20 b3 Rxd4 21 Nxd4 Qb4 22 Nde2 Ne8 23 e5 Qa5 24 Ne4 Qxe5 and Black has won back the sacrificed pawn with better chances, Yu Shaoteng-Le Quang Liem, Subic Bay 2009.

c) 12 ... h5 has also been played, aiming to prevent White from playing g2-g4. But after 13 h3 Nc4 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 g4 b5 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 exd5 h4 18 Ne2 Qc7 as played in Yu Shaoteng-Wang Yue, Tianjing 2001, now 19 b3 promises White an advantage.

13 h4

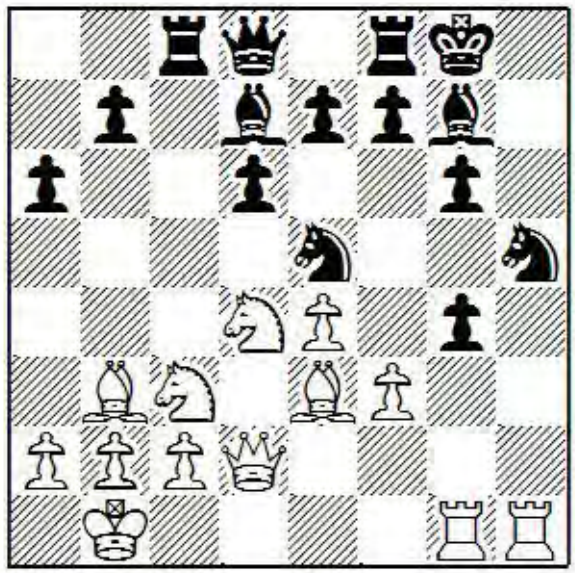
Earlier in the same tournament, Ivanchuk tested 13 Rhe1 against Carlsen. After 13 ... b5 14 Bh6 Bxh6 15 Qxh6, we reached a crucial moment:

a) 15 ... Rxc3 is the 'normal' move, but in this case not the best and after 16 bxc3 a5 17 f4 Neg4 18 Qh4 a4 19 Bxf7+! Rxf7 20 e5 Nd5 21 e6 Nxc3+ 22 Kc1 (White has the advantage after 22 Ka1! Bxe6 23 Nxe6 Qc8 24 Rd4 Nxa2 25 Qh3! Qxc2 26 Qf3 according to Rogozenco) 22 ... Bxe6 23 Nxe6 Qa5 24 Qxg4 Nxa2+ 25 Kb2 Qc3+ 26 Kxa2 Qxc2+ 27 Ka1 Qc3+ 28 Kb1 Qb3+ 29 Ka1 Qc3+ a draw by perpetual check was reached, V.Ivanchuk-M.Carlsen, Bilbao 2008.

b) 15 ... a5! 16 Ndxb5 Bxb5 17 Nxb5 a4 18 Bxa4 (18 Bd5? Qb6 19 Nd4 Rc5 gives Black a dangerous

attack) 18 ... Qa5 19 b3 Nc4! 20 Qc1 Nd7 (followed by ... Ndb6) and White is getting into serious trouble.

13 ... h5 14 g4 hxg4 15 h5 Nxh5 16 Rdg1



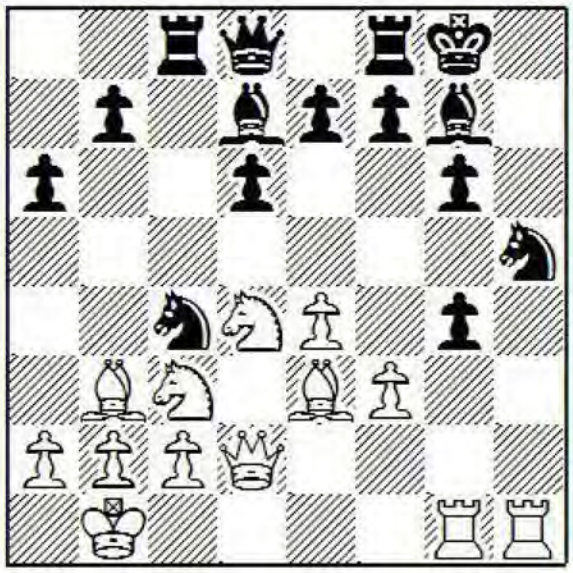
This position is similar to Polgar-Kaidanov in Game 59, but with Black having played ... a7-a6 here instead of ... Re8. These days, this is the critical position of the 12 Kb1 line. Instead, 16 Bh6 e6 (16 ... Kh7 is an interesting alternative with 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Rdg1 Rh8 19 f4 Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 f5 Nf6 22 Qe3 Rc5 favouring Black, K.Maslak-D.Gochelashvili, Moscow 2010) 17 Rdg1 Qf6 18 fxg4 Bxh6 19 Qxh6 Qg7 20 Qe3 Nf6 21 g5 Nh5 22 Nde2 a5 23 Rxh5 gxh5 24 Nf4 was L.Dominguez Perez-M.Carlsen, Biel 2008, and now 24 ... h4 25 Nh5 Qh8 26 Nf6+ Kg7 27 Rh1 Rfd8 28 Qf2 Ng6 29 Rf1 Bc6 30 Nh5+ forces a perpetual check.

16 ... Rc5

The alternatives don't look promising:

a) Prior to the present game, Carlsen had also tried 16 ... Qa5?! and now 17 Bh6 Bf6!? (17 ... Rxc3? is refuted instantly with 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Rxh5! as in V.Anand-M.Carlsen, Mainz (rapid) 2008) 18 fxg4 Bxg4 19 Bg5! (instead, taking the exchange with 19 Bxf8 Kxf8 20 Qe3 Rxc3 21 Qxc3 Qxc3 22 bxc3 e6 turned out give Black excellent compensation for the two (!) exchanges he has sacrificed, S.Karjakin-T.Radjabov, Sochi 2008) 19 ... Nc4 20 Bxc4 Bxg5 21 Qg2 Nf6 22 Nd5 e6, J.Alonso-B.Gonzalez, Havana 2014, and here White could decide the game with 23 Nxe6 fxe6 24 Nxf6+ Rxf6 25 Qxg4 Rxc4 26 Qh3 and it is all over for Black.

Question: Is there any issue with removing one of White's dangerous bishops with 16 ... Nc4? Isn't that a standard idea after ... Rc8 and ... Ne5?



Answer: It fails tactically as White's 16 Rdg1 is geared to take advantage of that sequence.

b) 16 ... Nc4? is unsatisfactory as after 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 fxg4 Nf6 19 Nf5!, White gets a nasty attack since the Dragon bishop is about to be exchanged and Black cannot allow the opening of the g-file.

17 Bh6

The immediate 17 f4!? is an interesting alternative, which can prove quite problematic for Black with 17 ... Nc4 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 f5 e5 (instead, 19 ... Nf6 20 Bh6! Bh8 21 fxg6 fxg6 22 Qg5 Kf7 23 Bxf8 Qxf8 24 Nb3 may be playable for Black) 20 fxe6 fxe6 21 Rxg4 Qf6 22 Nde2 Qf3 played in M.Lokander-N.Kumsiashvili, Maribor 2012, and now 23 Rhg1 Be8 24 Bh6 looks very nice for White.

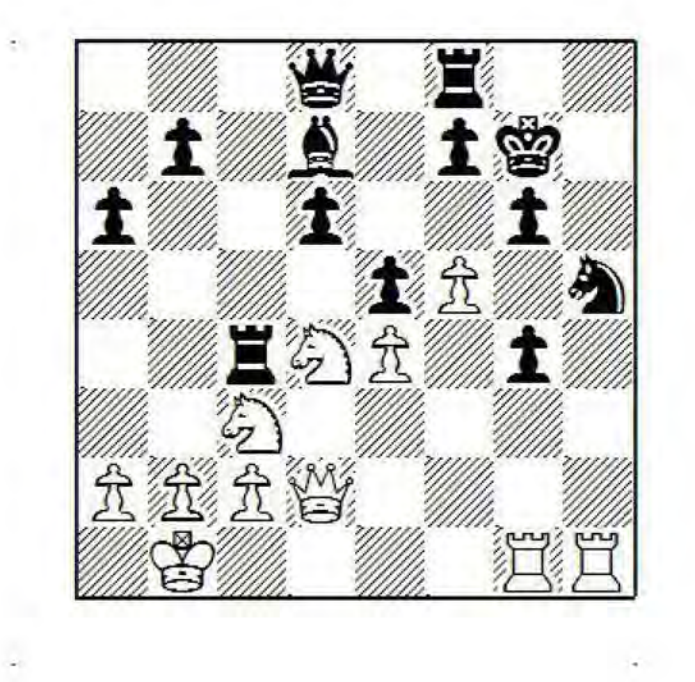
17 ... Kh7!

By forcing White to make a decision regarding the bishops, Black gains time to swing a rook to h8 to help defend the kingside against White's assault.

18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 f4

An important alternative is 19 fxg4 after which Black needs to play extremely precisely with 19 ... Nxg4 (not 19 ... Bxg4? as White wins easily with 20 Rxh5 gxh5 21 Nf5+ Kf6 22 Qh6+ Ng6 23 Nh4) 20 Nd5 (20 Nf5+ is fine for Black after 20 ... Rxf5 21 exf5 Bxf5) 20 ... Rh8 21 Nf5+ Bxf5 (21 ... gxf5? 22 Qg5+) 22 exf5 (in this position, a draw was agreed in S.Zhigalko-M.Mchedlishvili, Tashkent 2014) 22 ... Nhf6 23 Rxh8 Qxh8 24 fxg6 fxg6 and Black appears to hold everything together (Rogozenco).

19 ... Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 f5 e5!



Question: Doesn't this move leave Black with a backward pawn on the semi-open d-file?

Answer: It does, but Black had to address the threat of Rxh5 and decided that giving his queen a path to queenside (while threatening the knight) weighed more heavily than the temporary concerns about a backward pawn.

The other defensive move, 21 ... Rh8, is entirely too passive and after 22 Rxg4 e5 23 fxe6 Bxe6 (or 23 ... fxe6? 24 Rhg1 Qf6 25 Nf3 Be8 26 e5, and White is winning) 24 Nxe6+ fxe6 25 Rf1, White has ample compensation for the pawn as the black position is fractured and uncoordinated.

22 Nde2!?

I remember watching the game live on-line, and was very impressed with Topalov's cool handling of the position. The exchange of pawns with 22 fxe6 fxe6 is not particularly critical:

a) 23 Rxg4? is met by 23 ... e5 24 Nf5+ (24 Rxh5? Rf1+ 25 Nd1 Bxg4 26 Qh6+ Kf7 wins for Black – Rogozenco) 24 ... Bxf5 25 Rxh5 Bxg4 26 Qh6+ Kf7 27 Qh7+ Ke8 28 Qxg6+ Kd7 29 Qxg4+ Kc6 and Black has excellent winning chances (Rogozenco).

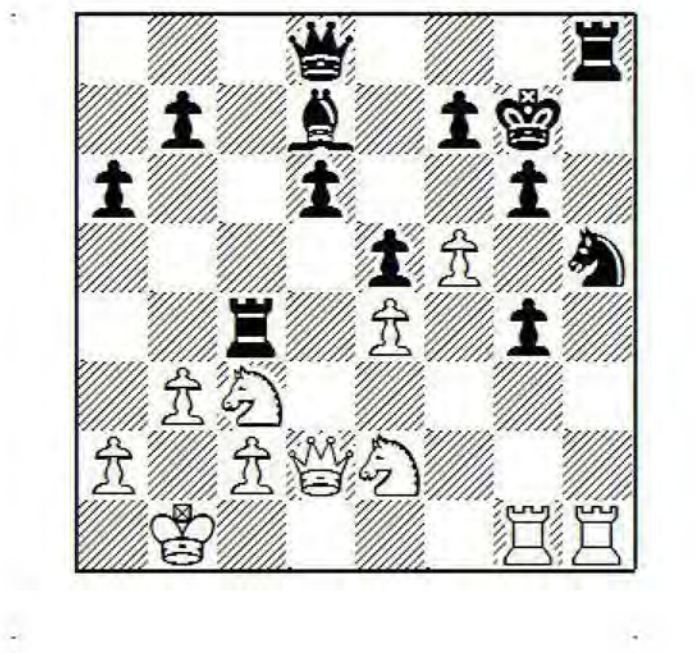
b) 23 b3 Rc5 24 Rxg4 Rf6 is fully playable for Black.

c) 23 Nde2 e5 24 Qxd6 Qe8 reaches a fascinating position where Black should be doing fine.

22 ... Rh8

The only move, but of course we are familiar with this defensive plan from the Soltis Variation with 13 Bh6 Nc4.

23 b3



Question: I have seen this move a couple of times now, what is point behind the move? Also, isn't the d6-pawn hanging?

Answer: White wants to force the rook to a less active square as well as being able to capture the g4-pawn. Grabbing the d6-pawn passes the initiative to Black as shown below:

a) The immediate 23 Rxg4 is convincingly met with 23 ... Bxf5! 24 Rgh4 Be6 and Black is up two pawns although 25 Ng3 Kf8 26 Nxh5 Rxh5 27 Rxh5 gxh5 28 Rxh5 Ke7 is no more than slightly better for Black.

b) The pawn grab 23 Qxd6 looks like an obvious move because the e5-pawn is now hanging as well, but Black actually just plays 23 ... Bc6! 24 Qxe5+ Qf6 25 Qxf6+ Nxf6 26 Rxh8 Kxh8 27 e5 Ne4 and Black is better in the endgame (Rogozenco).

23 ... Rc6?

Obvious, but it also happens to be a serious mistake due to the need for Black to connect his rooks on the back rank! The correct move is 23 ... Rc8!, overprotecting the back rank, which is the key to Black's defence. Now 24 Rxg4 (or 24 fxg6 fxg6 25 Qxd6 Re8! with a pleasant game for Black) 24 ... Nf6 25 Rgg1 (after 25 Rxh8 Qxh8 26 Rg1 Rc6 and now 27 Ng3 can be met with 27 ... Qh6 28 Qe1and White has compensation for the pawn, but not more than that) 25 ... Qe7 26 Ng3 Rxh1 27 Rxh1 Rh8 and Black has equalised.

24 Rxg4

The idea for White is to follow up with Rgh4 and Nd5, hogtying Black before introducing Ng3 when it is curtains for the latter. Therefore Black is left without a choice.

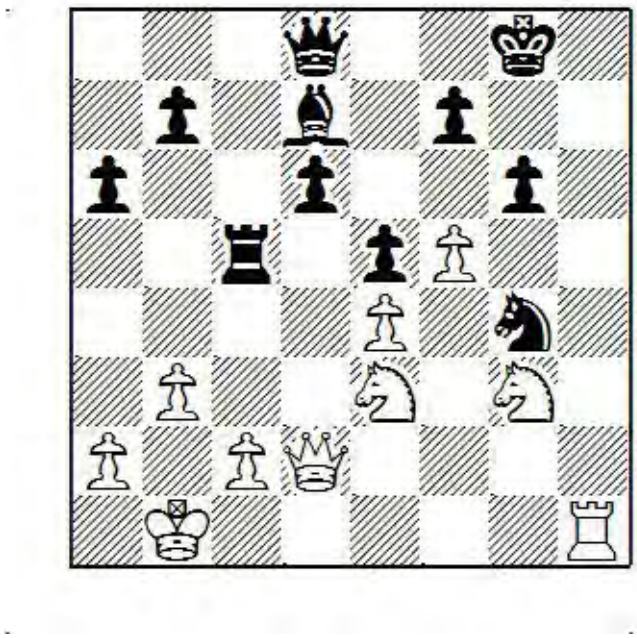
24 ... Nf6 25 Rgg1!

In all its simplicity, this move is beautiful. Black's position is on the verge of collapsing since he has no way of opposing White's seizure of the h-file. On the other hand, 25 Rgh4?? basically loses on the spot due to 25 ... Nxe4!.

25 ... Rxh1 26 Rxh1 Ng4

When this move was played (with the intention of guarding the h6-square), I knew for sure that Black was on the ropes. The knight is hanging loose in the air without any back-up and it will get punished sooner or later.

27 Ng3 Kg8 28 Nd5 Rc5 29 Ne3!



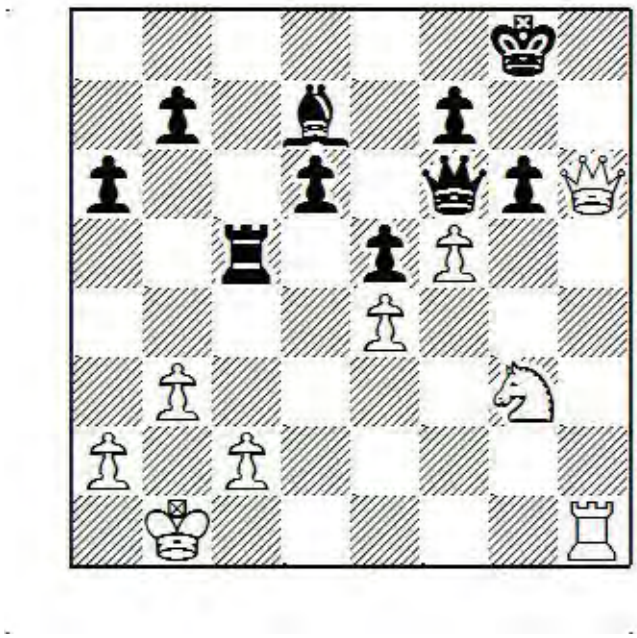
Question: Why does White offer to exchange his amazing d5-knight for the loose g4-knight?

Answer: White wants to exchange Black's crucial defensive piece to get easier access to Black's king. I know it does not look entirely obvious, but Black is completely lost.

29 ... Nxe3

Instead, 29 ... Qg5? is met by 30 Qxd6 and it is game over for Black.

30 Qxe3 Qf6 31 Qh6



Exercise: What is White's threat?

Answer: The dastardly 32 Nh5! is in the works.

31 ... Qg7 32 Qg5 f6 33 Qd2

And all of a sudden, it is impossible for Black to guard all of his weaknesses.

33 ... Rc6 34 Kb2?

This is a very strange decision by Topalov. The obvious 34 Qa5 delivers the knock-out punch after 34 ... b6 (or 34 ... Rc8 35 Qd5+ Kf8 36 fxg6) 35 Qxa6 Rc8 36 Qxb6 and White will soon pick the d6-pawn

up as well.

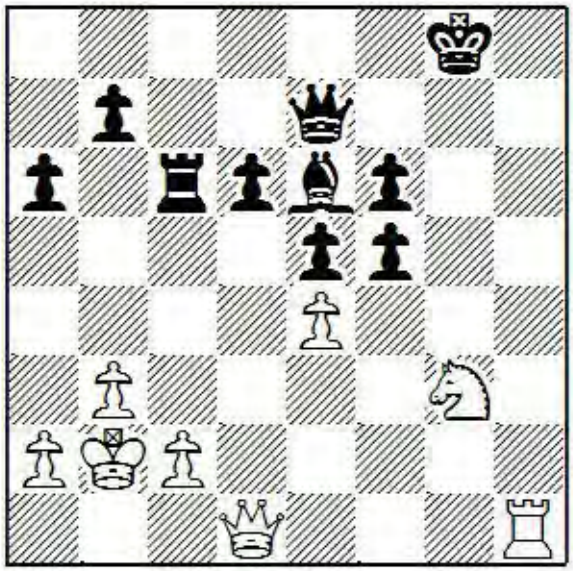
34 ... gxf5?

The best defensive move was 34 ... Be8! but after 35 fxg6 Bxg6 36 Rh4, Black still has a difficult defensive task ahead.

35 Qa5! Qe7

Or 35 ... b6 36 Qd5+ Kf8 37 Nxf5 and White is clearly better.

36 Qd5+ Be6 37 Qd1!



The threat is Qh5 and thus, Black doesn't gain time to play ... f5-f4.

37 ... Qg7 38 exf5 Bf7 39 Ne4 Kf8 40 Nxd6 Ke7

The time control has been reached, and the win is now rather simple for White.

41 Nxb7 Qg8 42 Qd2

Here, 42 Rh7! is best.

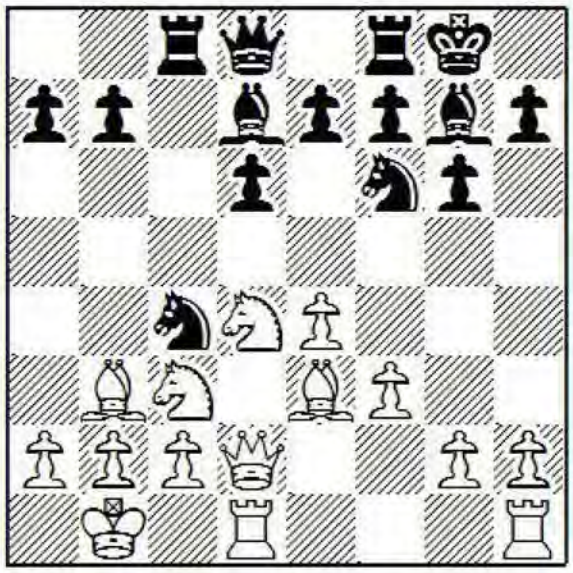
42 ... Rb6 43 Rd1 Qc8 44 Nd6

White chooses to exchange to an endgame that wins very easily though after 44 Nd8 Qc7 45 Nxf7 Kxf7 46 Qd5+ Kf8 47 Rg1, Black cannot prevent mate.

44 ... Qd7 45 Nxf7 Qxd2 46 Rxd2 Kxf7 47 c4 Ke7 48 Kc3 1-0

Game 58
B.Bok-I.Cheparinov
Biel 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1 Nc4



The old continuation.

13 Bxc4 Rxc4 14 g4!

This move has scored tremendously well for White and it is really the only move either side should concern themselves with when studying this line. Looking at anything else is an utter waste of time.

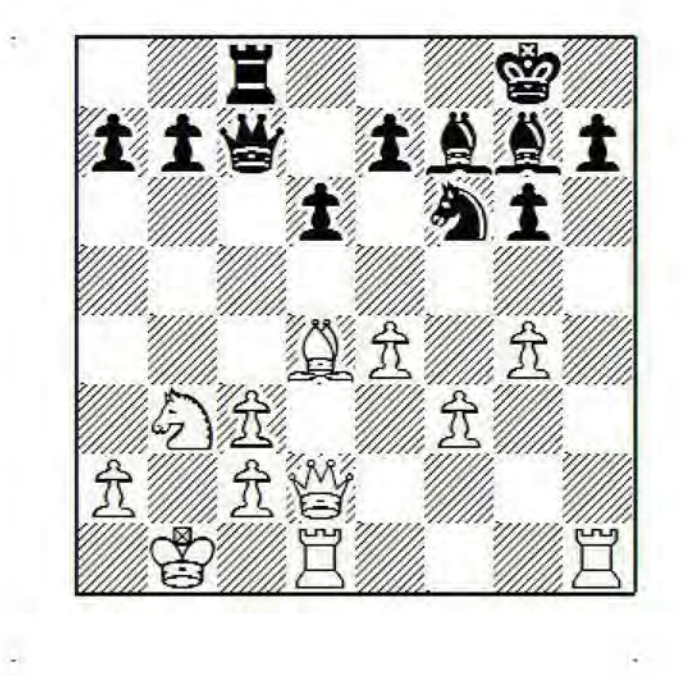
14 ... b5!?

This move has not always had the best reputation, primarily on account of White's next move. Therefore a long list of other moves have been tried, but ultimately these tries are less promising:

a) 14 ... Qa5 15 Nb3 Qa6 16 e5! (at the cost of a couple of pawns, White wins a piece) 16 ... Nxg4 17 fxg4 Bxg4 18 Rdf1 dxe5 (Ward on *Chesspublishing.com* mentions 18 ... Bxe5 19 Nd5 Re8 20 Bd4 after which he judges that the piece is stronger than the three pawns.) 19 Rhg1 Bf5 20 Bh6 Bxh6 21 Qxh6 e6 (anchoring the bishop to the f5-square, but now the dark squares around have been considerably weakened) 22 Nd2 Rb4 (Ward also mentions 22 ... Rxc3 23 bxc3 Rc8 with Black having insufficient compensation for the rook) 23 Rg3 Rd8 24 Rgf3 Qb6? (the threat against the b2-pawn does not represent any problems for Black and instead 24 ... Rf4 25 Rxf4 exf4 is very promising for Black) 25 Nde4! Rxb2+ (25 ... Bxe4 26 Rxf7 wins easily for White after 26 ... Rxb2+ 27 Ka1 Rxa2+ 28 Nxa2 Qd4+ 29 c3 Qd1+ 30 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 31 Kb2 Rb1+ 32 Ka3 Kxf7) 26 Ka1 f6 (Black could have tried this on move 23 or 24 but now it is too late) 27 Nxf6+ Kf7 28 Qxh7+ and the other knight comes to e4 next and mate is inevitable so Black resigned in D.Kaiumov-S.Solovjov, Alushta 2002.

b) 14 ... Qc7 15 g5 Nh5 16 Nd5 Qd8 17 Ne2 Be6 18 Bxa7 (18 Ng3 Bxd5 19 exd5 Qd7 20 b3 Rc7 21 Nxh5 gxh5 22 Bd4 Bxd4 23 Qxd4 is called nearly equal by my computer and the game did in fact end in a draw swiftly, P.Svidler-L.Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 1999) 18 ... Bxd5 19 Qxd5 Qc7 20 c3 Ra4 21 Be3 Rfa8 22 a3 R4a5 23 Qd3 Qd7 24 h4 Qa4 25 Nd4 and while Black has some compensation and eventually secured a draw, here he is clearly worse, S.Karjakin-Le Quang Liem, Dresden 2008.

c) An interesting concept is 14 ... Qb8 15 h4 Rfc8 16 h5 Rxc3!? 17 bxc3 Qc7 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 Nb3 Be6 20 Bd4 Bf7.



Question: Black has sacrificed the exchange (without even getting the h-pawn in return like in some variations). What is his justification?

Answer: The most important point is, Black is no longer in danger of getting mated with the h5-square being heavily shored up. He can also now apply more press on the queenside with the c-file pressure and the incoming ... a5-a4 advance. After 21 g5 Nh5 22 Bxg7 Nxg7 23 f4 a5 24 Rh3 a4 25 Nc1 Qd7!, Black has reasonable compensation for the exchange, S.Ganguly-S.Abu Sufian, Doha 2003.

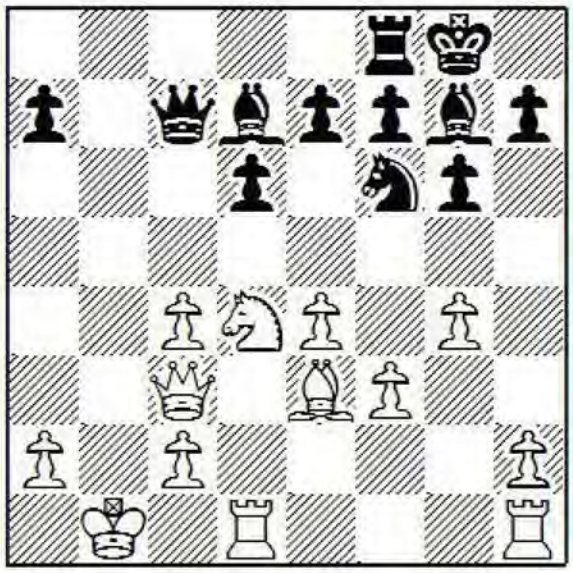
15 b3

If you think a pawn is a pawn, then you will soon feel the hurt, as the greedy 15 Ndxb5 is met by 15 ... Qb8 16 Nd4 Rfc8 17 Ka1 Bxg4 18 fxg4 Nxe4 19 Qe2 Rxc3 20 bxc3 Nxc3 21 Qd2 Qa8 22 Qd3 e5 23 Rdf1 exd4 24 Bf4 Qd5 25 Kb2 Rb8+ and White resigned in A.Shchekachev-M.Golubev, Dimitrovgrad 1988.

15 ... b4

Black goes all in and throws all his chips loosely on the roulette table. Actually this is not Black's most commonly played move. Far more frequently, Black has opted for 15 ... Rc8 but White's score against this more is absolutely devastating after 16 Ndxb5 (this pawn is a bit more tasty this time around) 16 ... Qa5 17 a4 a6 18 Nd5 Qxd2 19 Nxe7+ Kh8 20 Rxd2 Rce8 21 Nxd6 (21 Nxg6+ fxg6 22 Nxd6 Re6 was played inV.Topalov-S.Tiviakov, Polanica Zdroj 1995 and now 23 Bc5 Bc6 24 Nc4 Rc8 25 Bd4 leaves White clearly better with four pawns for the bishop) 21 ... Rxe7 22 Bc5 Re5 23 Nb7 Rc8 24 Bd4 Re7 25 g5 Ne8 26 Bc5 Rxc5 27 Nxc5 and with rook and three pawns for two bishops, White should be winning, D.Dvirnyy-D.Rombaldoni, Boscotrecase 2014.

16 bxc4 bxc3 17 Qxc3 Qc7



Question: Black seems to have made a significant investment in material, what has he received in return?

Answer: Let us start with the obvious things first:

1) White's king position is obviously wide open and so is the b-file.

2) The dark squares in White's position are terribly weak on account of nearly all of White's pawns being on light squares and the c-pawn can be attacked.

3) At the same time, White's attacking potential has been muted for at least while, because his pieces will be engaged trying to organise a defence. While there are not any concrete threats at the moment, there will be plenty to look at later on.

Overall, Black's position is easier to play, but he needs to build up his initiative to make it count.

18 Kc1

Question: Is it strictly necessary to start moving the king already?

Answer: I don't think so, but several people, including strong players like Bok have been nervous about leaving the king on the open b-file. However, there is an argument for waiting a little and see what Black has in mind before committing the king to either the c1- or a1-square. I certainly would consider that.

Let's look at the alternatives:

a) Black does not have any worries after 18 g5 Nh5 19 Kc1 Rc8 (or 19 ... Be5!? to take control over the dark squares) 20 Qd3 Be5 21 h4 Nf4 22 Bxf4 Bxf4+ 23 Kb2 as in B.Socko-J.Stocek, Germany 2006, and here Vigorito suggests 23 ... Rb8+ 24 Ka1 Rb4 with a comfortable game Black.

b) 18 h4 h5 19 g5 Nh7 20 Ka1 Rc8 21 Rb1 Nf8 22 Rb3 Ne6 23 Qd2 Nc5 and Black has excellent compensation for the exchange, E.Hedman-P.Carlsson, Malmo 2012.

18 Ka1 Rc8 19 Rb1 Be8 20 h4 (20 Qb3 Nd7 21 c3 Nb6 22 Bc1 Qc5 23 Ba3 Qe5 with yet again excellent compensation for the exchange for Black, T.Hoepfl-J.Lechtynsky, Germany 2010) 20 ... Nd7 21 h5 Nb6 22 hxg6 fxg6 23 Rh2 Nxc4 with a very pleasant game for Black, V.Nithander-P.Carlsson, Vaxjo 2008.

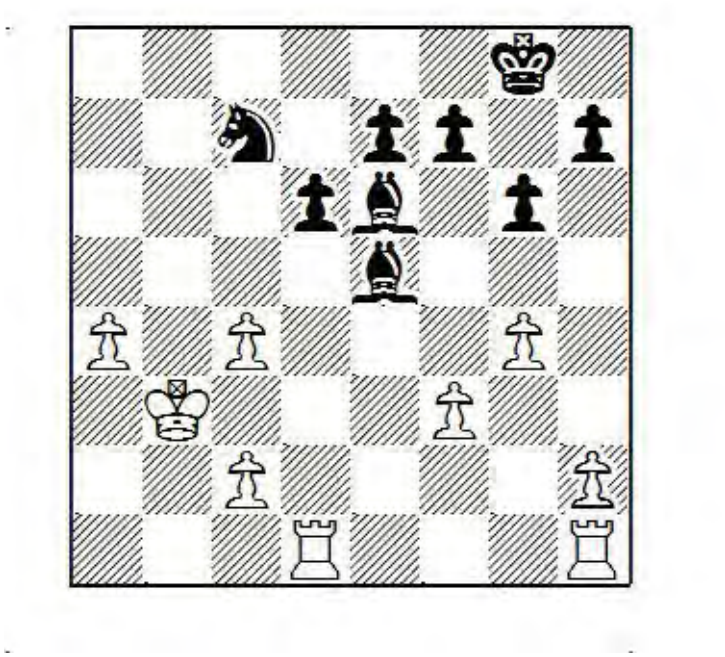
c) The most promising try seems to be 18 Bc1:

c1) Less accurate is 18 ... d5?! 19 Bb2 Rb8 20 Nb3 dxe4 21 Qe5 Qxe5 22 Bxe5 and White is clearly better, A.Greet-G.Jones, Torquay 2009.

c2) 18 ... Be6 19 Bb2 Rb8 (19 ... Bxc4 20.Nb3 Rc8 21 Rhe1 (21 Qd2 a5 22 Qxa5 Qxa5 23 Nxa5 Be2 and now White can return the exchange with 24 Rd3 Bxd3 and remain a pawn up) 21 ... Qb7 22.Qd2 Be6

23.g5 Nd7 24.Bxg7 Kxg7 and White still has the upper hand.

c3) 18 ... Rb8+ 19 Bb2! Be6 20 Nb3 and after a flurry of trades with 20 ... a5 21 e5! Ne8 22 Qxa5 Rxb3 23 Qxc7 Rxb2+ 24 Kxb2 Bxe5+ 25 Kb3 Nxc7 26 a4 with a tricky endgame with two rooks against three minor pieces.



Now Black's best defence is likely 26 ... Kf8 (26 ... Na6 27 Rd5!? leaves White with excellent chances to win) 27 a5 Ke8 28 Kb4 Kd7 29 Rhe1 Kc6 and neither side will be able to get much further.

18 ... Rc8 19 h4 h5 20 g5 Nh7

Question: With the knight out of play on h7, it seems like White is improving his chances. Is that a fair assessment?

Answer: It would seem so, but in fact the h7-square is just a temporary station for the knight. Next, it will move to the f8-square and from there to either the d7- or e6-squares, at which point White will have to take it seriously.

21 Kd2 Be6 22 Ke2 Bxc4+ 23 Kf2

Question: With the king now all the way over on the kingside, can he consider it to have reached safety?

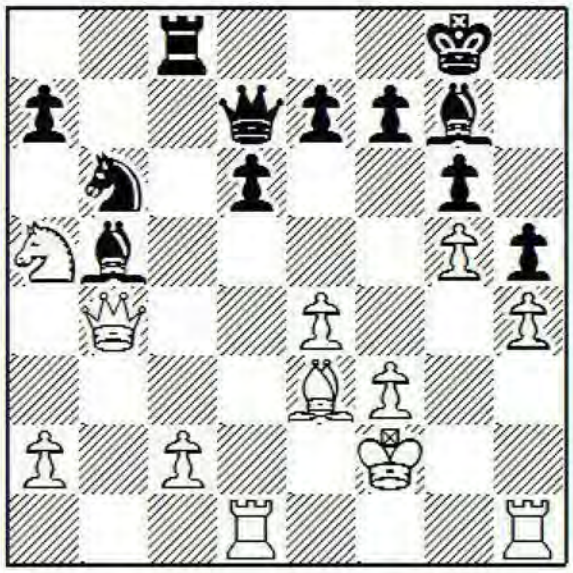
Answer: Well, maybe we can call it relative safety when comparing it to being on the queenside. But, without a solid pawn cover, the king will never be completely safe. Furthermore Black will soon complete his development, including that of the h7-knight, whereas White's pieces still have a disjointed feel to them.

23 ... Nf8 24 Qa3 Nd7 25 Nb3 Nb6 26 Na5

An interesting move, White is trying to exchange some pieces or at least disrupt Black's game a bit.

26 ... Bb5 27 Qb4 Qd7

Black's very active pieces make it difficult for White to get his pieces developed to active squares.



28 Bd4 Rxc2+ 29 Rd2 Nc4

As pointed out by Vigorito, Black should possibly start thinking about settling for a draw after this move. He further suggests 29 ... Bxd4+ 30 Qxd4 Qc7, and after 31 Rxc2 Qxc2+ 32 Kg3 Qxa2 33 Ra1 Qe6 34 Rc1, Black has fully adequate compensation for the exchange.

30 Rxc2 Bxd4+ 31 Kg3 Bc5?!

Amazingly, Black rejects the opportunity to repeat the moves with 31 ... Be5+ 32 Kf2 Bd4+. Despite being down two exchanges, he is still playing all out for a win.

32 Qc3 Ne3

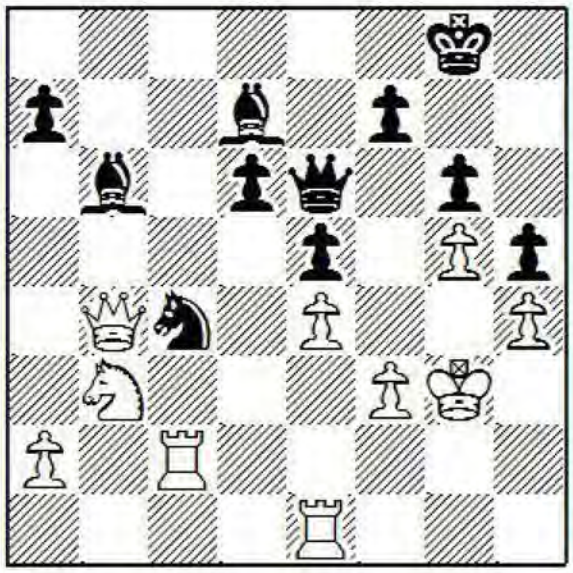
Question: It looks like 32 ... Nxa5 33 Qxa5 is quite playable for Black, is that correct?

Answer: No, this position is clearly worse for Black. While he does have a bishop pair and a pawn as well as a weak white king to play against, being two exchanges down represents a huge material deficit.

33 Rb2 e5 34 Nb3 Bb6 35 Re1 Nc4 36 Rc2 Qe6 37 Qb4?

On account of what happened in the game, Vigorito suggests that both players were probably in time trouble by now. Here White had the strong 37 a4 available and after 37 ... Bd7 38 Rh1 Ne3 39 Re2 Bxa4 40 Rxe3 Bxe3 41 Qxe3 Bxb3 42 Qxa7, White wins.

37 ... Bd7!



Threatening mate on h3.

38 Rh2 Be3?

It looks so obvious for Black to bring the bishop into the attack. Instead Black should have played 38 ... a5 39 Qc3 a4 40 Rc1 Ne3! 41 Qb4 Ng4!, which pretty much requires White to pull the emergency brake with 42 Qxb6 Nxh2 43 Qd8+ Kh7 44 Qf6 Qh3+ 45 Kf2 Kg8 46 Qd8+ Kh7 47 Qf6, reaching a draw by repetition.

39 Rhh1 Bf4+ 40 Kf2 a5 41 Nxa5 Nd2 42 Re2 Nxf3

It is beginning to look like Black finally having some progress with his attack against the white king. The knight of course cannot be taken. But Bok had undoubtedly had anticipated this and has a strong reply in hand.

43 Qb3! d5 44 Kxf3?!

Instead, 44 exd5 Qa6 45 Nc6 keeps an advantage for White.

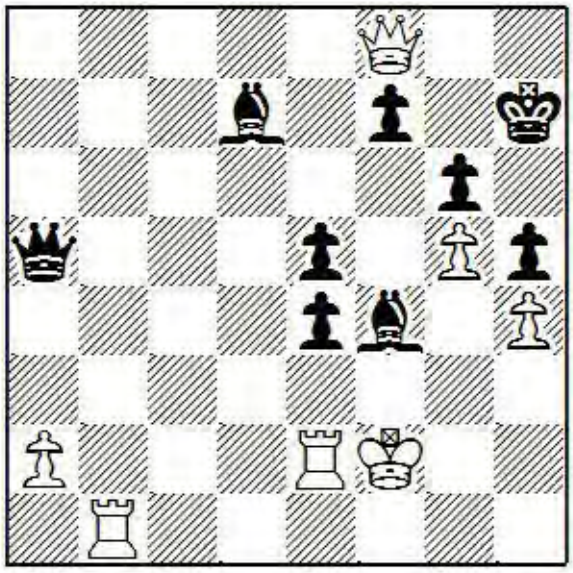
44 ... Qa6?

Black had saving chances with 44 ... Ba4 when 45 Qb8+ Kg7 46 Kf2 Qg4 47 Qb2 Qg3+ 48 Kf1 Qf3+ is a draw.

45 Kf2 Qxa5 46 Rb1?

White should play 46 Qxd5 Qa7+ 47 Kg2 Bg4 48 Rhe1 with excellent winning chances.

46 ... dxe4 47 Qb8+ Kh7 48 Qf8



48 ... Qd5??

An unbelievable massive blunder by Black who walks into a mate.

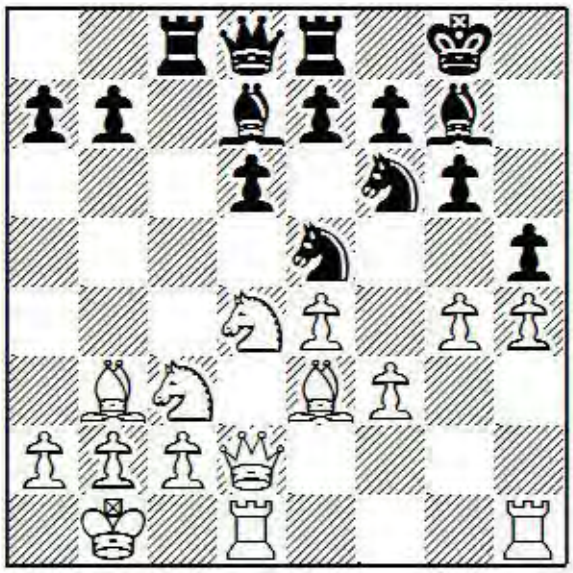
He could have salvaged half a point with 48 ... Qa7+ 49 Kg2 Bh3+ 50 Kh1 (50 Kxh3 Qd7+ 51 Kg2 Qg4+ is one perpetual check) 50 ... Bg4 51 Rf2 e3 52 Rb8 Qxb8 Qxf7+ (not 53 Qxb8?? exf2 54 Kg2 Be3 55 Qb5 e4 and Black is actually winning) 53 ... Kh8 54 Qf6+ Kg8 55 Qxg6+ Kf8 56 Qf6+ Kg8 leads to a draw.

49 Qh6+ 1-0

Black resigned without waiting for 49 ... Kg8 50 Rb8+.

Game 59
J.Polgar-G.Kaidanov
Hilton Head 2010

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Ne5 12 Kb1 Re8 13 h4 h5 14 g4



The text move is White's most aggressive and dangerous approach.

In our next main game, we will discuss 14 Bh6.

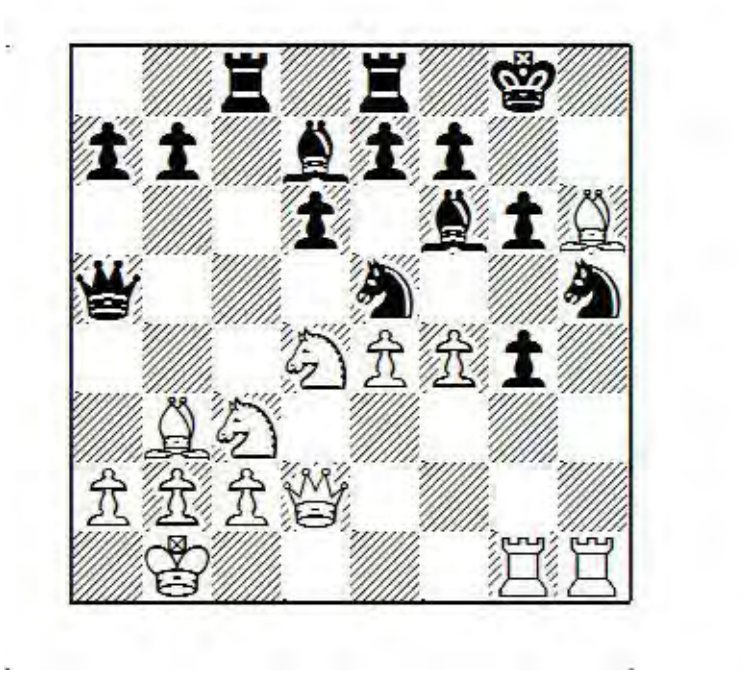
14 ... hxg4 15 h5 Nxh5 16 Rdg1?!

White plays for a direct attack by taking aim at the g6-pawn as well as preparing at some point, the Nf5 sacrifice. However, this approach can be improved. More precise is 16 Bh6 e6 (instead, 16 ... Bf6 17 fxg4 Bxg4 18 Rdg1 was J.Cubas-A.Fier, Campinas 2009, and now Black should have played 18 ... e6 19 Ndb5 Rc5 20 Be3 Be7) 17 Rdg1 transposing to the main game by using a more accurate move order for White.

16 ... e6

Black's best move is probably 16 ... Qa5!?, although it has yet to be tested in high-level games. After 17 Bh6 Bf6:

a) 18 f4??



Exercise: What did White overlook when he played this move? See if you can work out the entire sequence of forced moves that leads to a much better position for Black**.**

Answer: Black presses on the queenside with 18 ... Nc4 19 Qd3?! (19 Bxc4 Rxc4 20 Nb3 Qa6 leaves White two pawns for nothing) 19 ... Qc5 20 Nde2 Nxb2! 21 Kxb2 Bb5! and White will have to give up his queen to stay in the game, A.Nukin-E.Kanter, Izhevsk 2011.

b) White has a better option in 18 fxg4 Bxg4 (18 ... Nxg4?! 19 Nf5! Bxf5 20 exf5 Qxf5 21 Qd1 Bxc3 22 Qxg4 Qxg4 23 Rxg4 e6 24 bxc3 and although there is plenty of work left to be done, the two bishops should promise White decent winning chances in the long run) 19 Bg5 Bg7 20 Rh4 Rc5 (20 ... Nf6 has also proven to be playable) 21 Bh6 e6 22 Rhxg4 (or 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Rgxg4 Nxg4 24 Rxg4 Nf6 25 Rf4 Rh5 26 Rf1 Qe5 with a complex position where Black cannot be worse) 22 ... Nxg4 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Rxg4 Nf6 25 Rg1 Rxc3 26 bxc3 Nxe4 27 Qe3 Nxc3+ 28 Kb2 Na4+ 29 Bxa4 Qxa4 and Black has sufficient compensation for the piece, R.Cvak-L.Mezera, correspondence 2011.

17 Bh6 Qf6

Other choices are:

a) 17 ... g3 is favoured by the computer, but it is not entirely easy to play either:

a1) 18 Nce2! Qf6 19 Bxg7 Qxg7 (or 19 ... Kxg7 20 Rxh5 gxh5 21 Nxg3 Kf8 22 Nxh5 Qh8 23 Qg5 with clearly better chances for White, Y.Gonzalez Vidal-Y.Borges Feria, Ciego de Avila 2009) 20 Nxg3 Nxg3 21 Rxg3 a5 22 a3 (22 f4 Nc4 23 Qf2 is a suggestion of Pavlovic and if Black now plays 23 ... e5?, then 24 f5 decides the game) 22 ... a4 23 Ba2 Nc4 24 Bxc4 Rxc4 25 Ne2 (25 c3!? is also worthy of consideration) 25 ... e5 26 Rg2 Rec8 27 Qxd6 Be6 28 Nc3 and Black is struggling to stay in the game, G.Pezzica-T.Habermehl, correspondence 2008.

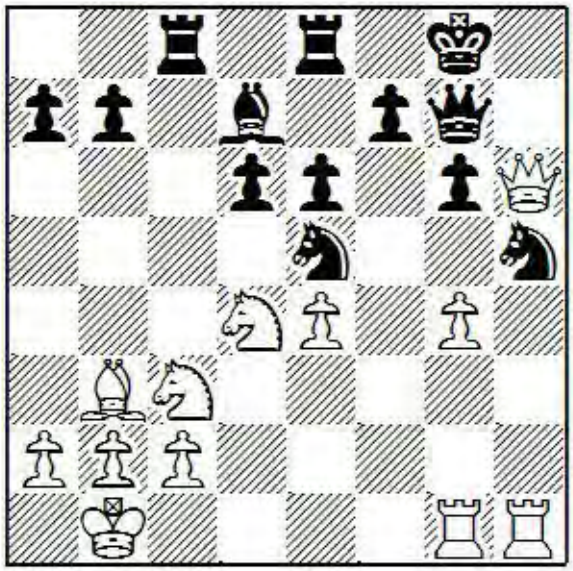
a2) 18 Rxh5 gxh5 19 Rxg3 Ng6 20 Nf5 Bf6 21 Nxd6 Rc6 22 Nxe8 Bxe8 23 Qh2 h4 24 Rg2 Bxc3 25 bxc3 Qd1+ 26 Bc1 Qxf3 27 Rg1 Kh7 28 Qb8 was M.Vachier Lagrave-R.Kasimdzhanov, San Sebastian 2009, and now Black could have secured good counterplay with Vigorito's suggestion of 28 ... h3!.

b) We have seen 17 ... Rxc3 many times by now, but here it is not particularly good as after 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Qxc3 Qb6 20 fxg4 Nf6 21 Qh3 Kf8 22 Nf3 Qc5 23 Ng5 a5 24 Rf1 Nexg4 25 Nxf7!, White should be winning, L.Aroshidze-O.Perez Mitjans, Barcelona 2011.

18 fxg4

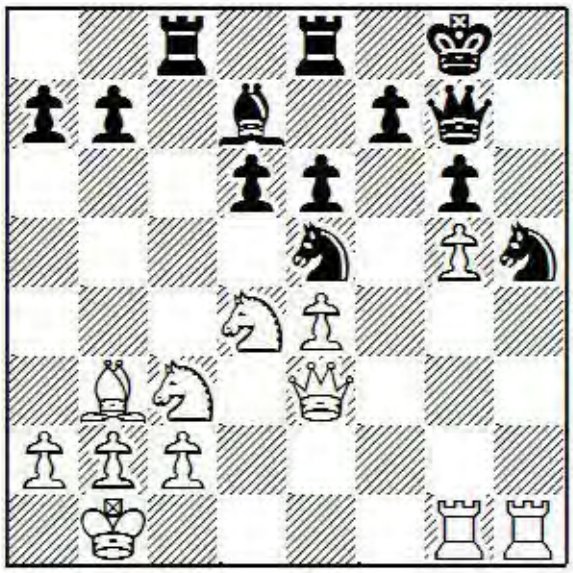
The impatient 18 Bxg7 only helps Black after 18 ... Kxg7 19 fxg4 Qf4! and Black is already in charge of the game, which concluded with 20 Qd1?! (20 Qe1 Nf6 21 Rf1 Qg5 leaves Black better; whereas taking the g4-pawn will energise White's initiative on the kingside) 20 ... Ng3 21 Nde2 Nxe2 22 Nxe2 Qxe4 23 Ng3? Qe3 24 Qxd6 Bc6 25 Nh5+ gxh5 26 gxh5+ Kh7 (that was the end of that attack) 27 Re1 Bxh1 28 Rxe3 Red8 and White resigned in Z.Stanojoski-M.Parligras, Budva 2009.

18 ... Bxh6 19 Qxh6 Qg7



20 Qd2

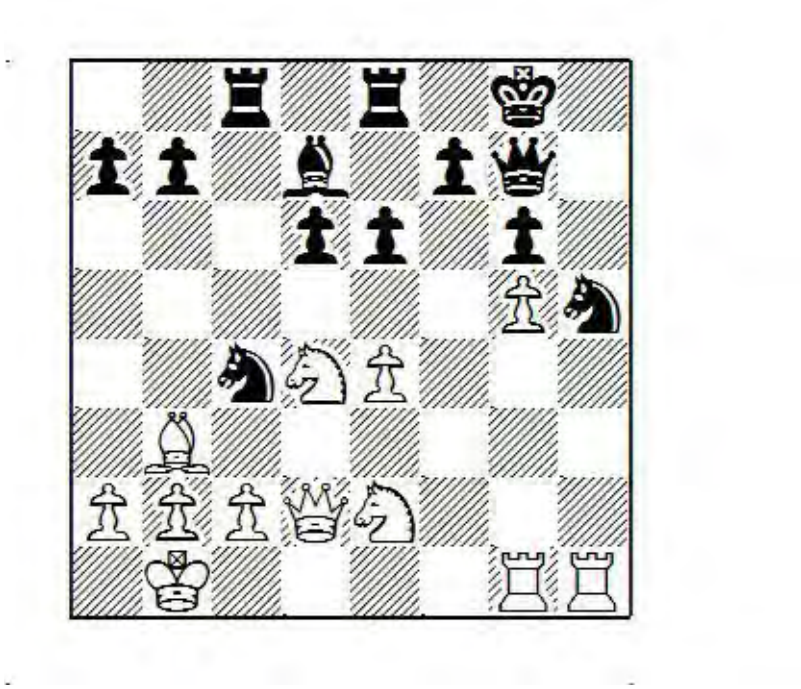
An important alternative is 20 Qe3 Nf6 21 g5 Nh5:



a) 22 Nde2 a5 (22 ... b5 23 Nf4! Nxf4 24 Qxf4 a5 25 Rg2! followed by Rgh2 and it is game over for Black) 23 a4 (Rogozenco offers the following computer-generated line: 23 Rxh5 gxh5 24 Nf4 Qh8 25 g6 fxg6 26 Nxg6 Nxg6 27 Nd5 exd5 28 Rxg6+ Kf7 29 Rh6 Qg7 and now my analysis continues with 30 Qf4+ Kg8 31 Bxd5+ Be6 32 Bxe6+ Rxe6 33 Rxe6 Rf8 34 Qc1 Rf6 35 Rxf6 Qxf6 which is assessed as slightly better for Black by *Houdini*, but defending against Black's passed h-pawn will not be much fun) 23 ... Rb8 24 Nd4 Qf8 25 Rd1 Rec8 26 Ndb5 and White's pressure promises him a small plus.

b) 22 Ndb5 Bxb5 23 Nxb5 Red8 24 Qxa7 (24 Rd1 lead to a draw by repetition after 24 ... Ng4 25 Qf3 Ne5 26 Qe3 Ng4 in I.Gaponenko-C.Koepke, Germany 2009) 24 ... Nf3 25 Rg2 Qe5 26 Qe3 (26 Qxb7? Rb8 is not an option) 26 ... Ne1!? (a small, but important detail; the white rook is lured away from the h-file and if Black lets White keep it on h1, then Black will run into problems after 26 ... Qxb5 27 Qxf3 Qe5 28 Rxh5!? gxh5 29 g6 with a strong attack for White) 27 Rxe1 Qxb5 28 c3 (intending to attack the h5-knight with Bd1) 28 ... Qe5 (Black's counterplay will consist of either ... Rc4 or ... d6-d5 thus White keeps the bishop on b3) 29 a3 b5 30 Ka2 (30 Bd1!? d5 31 Bxh5 gxh5 32 Qf3 d4 33 Rf1 Rd7 34 Rd2 Rcd8 35 Rxd4 Qxg5 36 Ka2 and Black's position with an open king is considerably more difficult to play than White's) 30 ... Kg7! 31 Rf1 (now 31 Bd1 brings nothing due to 31 ... Rh8) 31 ... Rc7 32 Qf3 Ra8 33 Rh1 Rh8, and the players repeated the move a couple of times before agreeing to a draw, L.Dominguez Perez-D.Smerdon, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

20 ... Nf6 21 g5 Nh5 22 Nce2 Nc4?



Question: Why do you call this a bad move? It is after all a normal move in the Dragon.

Answer: Just that a move is normal does not necessarily mean it is good. In this case, Black gives up a nicely placed knight for a bishop which has literally no prospects and is biting on the e6-pawn.

Instead Black should consider 22 ... Bc6, and now:

a) 23 Qe3 d5?! (Black should be able to improve with 23 ... b5!?, for instance 24 Ng3 Ng4 25 Qd2 Nxg3 26 Rxg3 Bxe4 27 Rh4 Bf5 28 Rhxg4 Bxg4 29 Rxg4 Rc5 with a playable position, although White clearly is the side with the better chances) 24 Ng3 Nxg3 25 Rxg3 dxe4 26 Nxc6 Nxc6 27 Rgh3 Ne7 28 Qxe4 a5 29 Bxe6 fxe6 30 Qxe6+ and Black resigned in P.Konguvel-V.Antonio, Delhi 2010.

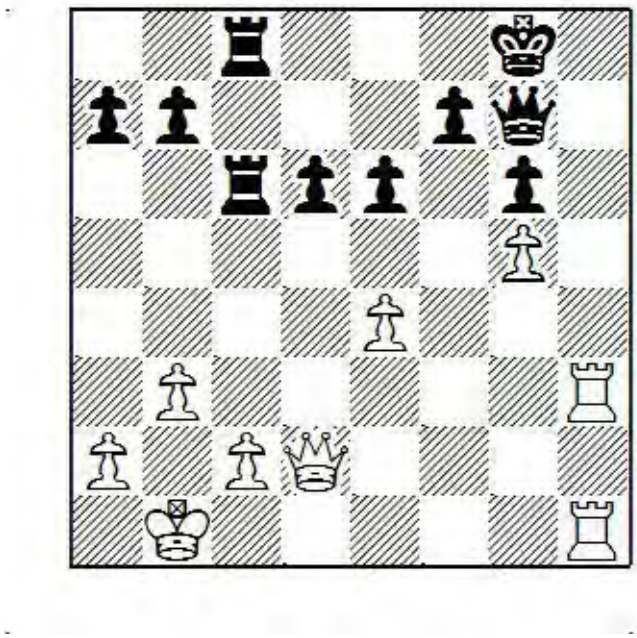
b) 23 Rxh5!? is fun and possibly excessive as after 23 ... gxh5 24 Nf4 Ng6 25 Nxh5 Qe5 26 Nf3 Qc5 27 Rf1 Bb5 28 Rh1 Kf8, while White probably is better, nothing is clear.

c) 23 Ng3 Nxg3 24 Rxg3 Bxe4 25 Rh4 Bf5 26 Rg1 Rc5 27 a3 Bg4 28 Rhxg4 Nxg4 29 Rxg4 Qh8 30 Rg1 Qh3 31 Qf2 Re5 32 Rf1 Re7?? (32 ... Qh7 is ugly, but better) 33 Qf6! (now it is game over) 33 ... Rd7 34 Ba4 b5 35 Bxb5 Rb7 36 Bc6 Rc7 37 Rh1 and there is little left for Black to do other than resign in I.Ortiz Suarez-D.Arenas Vanegas, Cali 2010.

23 Bxc4 Rxc4 24 b3 Rc5 25 Ng3 Nxg3 26 Rxg3 Rec8

The other options are hopeless:

a) White wins swiftly after 26 ... Bc6 27 Nxc6 Rxc6 28 Rgh3 Rec8.



Exercise: How can White close out the game quickly?

Answer: Control the h8-square further by plugging the f6-square with the queen with 29 Qf4 Rc3 30 Rh6 and Black resigned because 31 Qf6 is coming next, N.Galopoulos-A.Pavlidis, Athens 2014.

b) Also hopeless is 26 ... e5 27 Nf5 Bxf5 28 exf5 gxf5 29 Rgh3 as Black cannot stop White's decisive action on the h-file following 29 ... Re6 30 Qh2 Kf8 31 Rh8+ Ke7 32 Qh4 (threatening g5-g6) 32 ... Rg6 33 Qa4 and Black is without a defence.

27 Rgh3 e5 28 Rh4 exd4

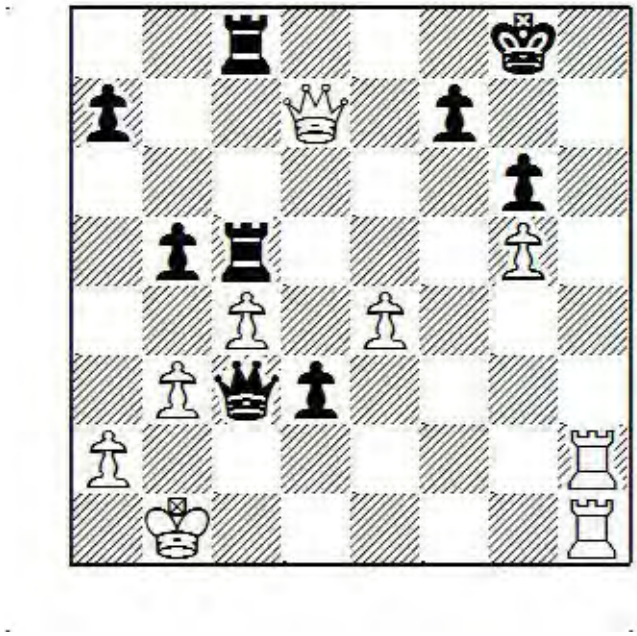
Black has in fact also tried 28 ... f5, but after 29 Qh2, he resigned in A.Abreu Delgado-L.Lorenzo de la Riva, Barbera del Valles 2010.

29 Qh2 Kf8 30 Qxd6+ Kg8 31 Qxd7 d3

Desperation, but nothing works. For example, 31 ... Rxc2 32 Qh3 Kf8 33 Rh8+ Ke7 34 Rxc8 is curtains.

32 c4 Qc3 33 R4h2 b5

After 33 ... R5c7 34 Qd6 Rc6 35 Qd5 Rc5 36 Qxb7 d2 37 Qd7 Qe5 38 Rh4, White wins.



Exercise: What is White's best move?

Answer: By interfering with Black's defence of the h8-square, White forces the black queen away from c3, and White can get the decisive attack going.

34 e5!

Now, White gains time to place a rook on the seventh rank with devastating effect.

34 ... Qxe5 35 Rh7 R5c7 36 Qd6! 1-0

Black cannot stop mate as after 36 ... Qc3 37 Qf6 Qc2+ 38 Ka1, it is the end.

Game 60
Z.Tesic-W.Standke
Correspondence 2012

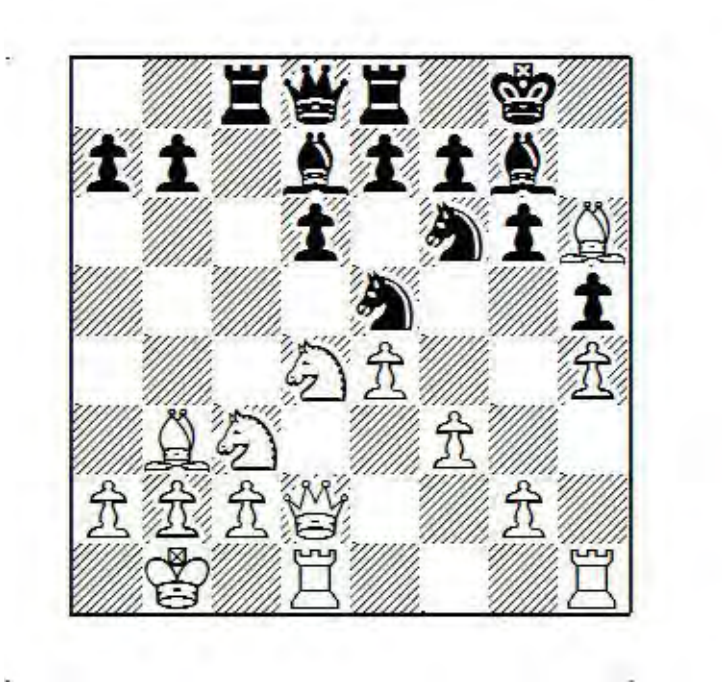
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2 Rc8 11 0-0-0 Ne5 12 Kb1 Re8 13 h4

Before moving on to the real subject of this game, let us take a look at what happens if White plays 13 Bh6 immediately:

a) 13 ... Bh8 14 h4 Nc4 15 Qd3 b5 16 h5 Qb6 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 g4 e6 19 Qf1 Nd5 20 exd5 Bxd4 21 Qh3 Nxb2 22 Rxd4 Qxd4 23 Bc1 Rxc3 24 Qh7+ Kf8 25 Bh6+ Ke7 26 Bg5+ Kf8 with a draw by perpetual check, G, Milos-A.Shabalov, Sao Paulo 2009.

b) 3 ... Bxh6 14 Qxh6 Rxc3 15 bxc3 a5 16 a4 Qb6 17 h4 Bxa4 18 h5 Nc6 19 hxg6 Bxb3 20 gxh7+ Kh8 21 cxb3 Nxd4 22 cxd4 Qxb3+ 23 Ka1 with perpetual check again, S.Karjakin-V.Ivanchuk, Foros 2007.

13 ... h5 14 Bh6



Question: Should Black just exchange on h6 and sac the exchange on c3 like in the Soltis Variation we looked at in the previous chapter?

Answer: Absolutely not! Compared to the Bh6 in the Soltis Variation, White has here played the very useful Kb1, while Black has played ... Re8 which almost never is played in those lines. As you may recall, that line is finely balanced and one tempo can be the deciding factor between a win, draw or loss.

14 ... Nc4

Question: As far as I can recall, we also looked at a line involving this move after Bh6 in the previous chapter. Is this not also playing with fire?

Answer: In the ... Nc4 lines of the previous chapter, White rarely plays Kb1 and when he does, it is not all that critical. In this line, it has been established as the safest choice for Black.

Let's look at the other options:

a) A major alternative is 14 ... Qa5, and now:

a1) 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 g4 Rxc3 (16 ... hxg4 17 h5 Rh8 is fine for Black) 17 bxc3 Rc8 18 gxh5 (18 g5 Ne8 19 f4 Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 e5?! Nc7 22 Qd3?! was E.Berg-Li Shilong, Moscow 2007, and here Black should have played 22 ... Nb5! 23 Nxb5 Qxb5+ 24 Ka1 Bf5 25 Qf1 dxe5 26 fxe5 Qc6 with winning chances) 18 ... Nxh5 19 Rhg1 Qxc3 20 Qg5 Nf6 (20 ... Nc4? 21 Bxc4 Rxc4 was E.Berg-P.Carlsson, Petra 2007, and now the simplest option for White is to play 22 Qxe7 Rb4+ 23 Nb3 Be6 24 Rxg6+! Kxg6 25 Qg5+ Kh7 26 Qxh5+ Kg8 27 Rxd6 with two extra pawns and an attack against Black's king) 21 h5 Nc4 22 Bxc4 Rxc4 23 Rd3 Qb4+ 24 Rb3 Qc5 25 Qxc5 dxc5 26 Nf5+ Bxf5 27 exf5 with a large advantage for White, which was duly converted in E.Berg-F.Amonatov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

a2) 15 g4!? looks like White's best move and after 15 ... Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Nb3 Qc7 19 e5 dxe5 20 g5 Bf5 21 gxf6+ exf6 22 Qe3, while Black managed to save the draw from this position, White should be clearly better at this point as the two pawns does not provide adequate compensation for the piece, Ni Hua-H.Banikas, Gibraltar 2008.

b) With the rook on e8, Black can also here consider 14 ... Bh8 and after say 15 g4 Nc4 16 Qd3 b5 17 gxh5 Nxh5 18 Rhg1 Qb6!? (18 ... e6?! is also met by 19 Bc1, intending f3-f4-f5 with the initiative for White, A.Timofeev-S.Azarov, Moscow 2007) 19 Bc1!, White's initiative still persists even after the queen trade 19 ... Qxd4 (19 ... a5 is met with 20 Rg5!) 20 Qxd4 Bxd4 21 Rxd4 Ne5 22 Rdd1 Kg7 23 f4 Nf3 24 Rgf1 Bg4 25 Rf2 with the better game for White.

15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 Bxg7

One of the leading Sicilian killers, Dr John Nunn tested 16 Nb3, but in this case Black proved to be fine after 16 ... Qc7 17 g4 Rxc3 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 bxc3 hxg4 20 h5 gxf3 21 hxg6 fxg6 22 Rdf1 Bg4 23 Nd4 Rc8 24 Kb2 and here a draw was agreed in J.Nunn-S.Berndt, Germany 2000, but Black is probably better in the final position after 24 ... Qb6+ 25 Ka1 Qa5 and White has problems. However, White can improve with 24 Qh6+ which leads to even chances according to my computer.

16 ... Kxg7 17 g4

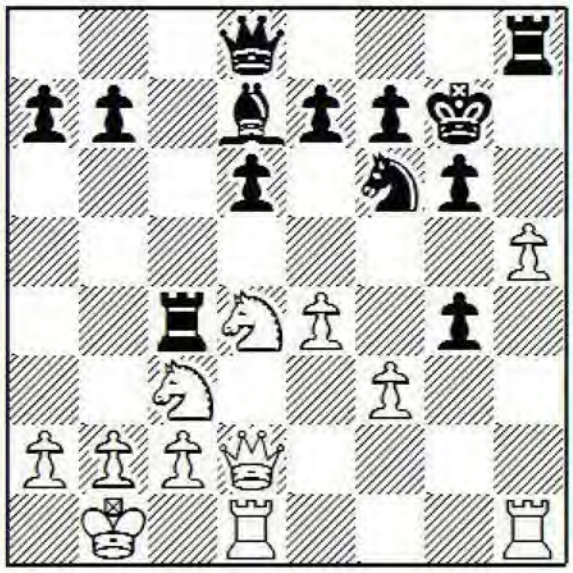
A look at the alternatives:

a) A major alternative is 17 Nd5 which has been tested in a couple of Carlsen's games:

After 17 ... e5 18 Nxf6 Qxf6 19 Nb3 (19 Ne2 Rc6 20 Nc3 Be6 21 Nd5 Bxd5 22 Qxd5 Qf4 23 Qd2 Qxd2 24 Rxd2 f5 and Black has fully equalised, S.Karjakin-M.Carlsen, Baku 2008) 19 ... Rec8 20 Qxd6 Be6 21 c3 b5 22 Qd2 was seen in P.Leko-M.Carlsen, Miskolc 2008, and here Vigorito recommends 22 ... Qe7, allowing White to repeat the moves with 23 Qd6 Qf6.

b) 17 Nde2 is harmless for Black and after 17 ... Qa5 18 Nf4 Rec8 19 Ncd5 Qxd2 20 Rxd2 Nxd5 21 Nxd5 Re8 22 b3 Rc5 23 Re1 a draw was agreed in P.Enders-D.Rogozenco, Germany 2009.

17 ... hxg4 18 h5 Rh8



We have seen a similar resource in the Soltis Variation. With the king on g7, this move is a standard way of warding off White's attack.

19 hxg6

Black is also fine after 19 fxg4 Bxg4 20 hxg6 as played in C.Sandipan-A.Motylev, Calcutta 2002, which continued 20 ... fxg6 21 Nd5 e5! 22 Rxh8 Qxh8 23 Qg5 Nxd5 24 Qxg4 Rxd4 25 Qd7+ Kg8 26 Qe8+ with a draw on account of perpetual check.

19 ... fxg6 20 f4

Other tries are:

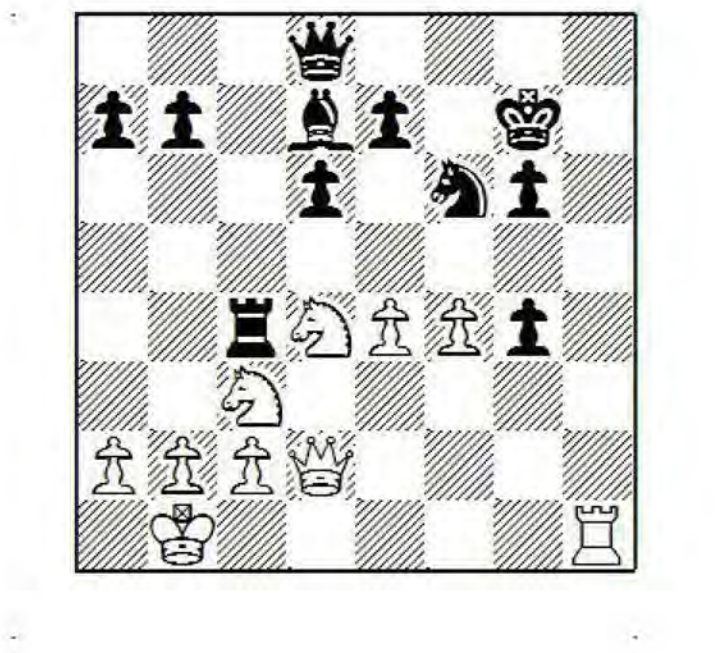
a) 20 Rxh8 only helps Black as after 20 ... Qxh8 21 f4 Qh5 22 b3 Rc8 23 Nde2 Z.Szabo-I.Kukel, Balaton 2005, and now following 23 ... Qc5 24 a4 a6 25 Rf1 Be6, Black is clearly in control of the game.

b) 20 b3!? is likely White's best move and after 20 ... Rc5 21 fxg4 Bxg4 22 Nd5 Nxd5 23 exd5 Rxd5 24 Rhg1 Qd7 25 Qg2 Rg5 26 Nf3 Bxf3 27 Qxg5 Qe6, despite having two pawns for the exchange, Black is fighting to keep the balance against White's ongoing initiative, D.Swiercz-Lu Shanglei, Golden Sands 2012.

20 ... Rxh1

The sharp 20 ... e5!? looks quite provocative, apparently opening up the position just as it seems that Black is uncoordinated. The idea is to prevent White from playing e4-e5 himself. Now 21 fxe5 (21 Nde2! Nxe4 (21 ... Rxh1 22 Rxh1 Nxe4 23 Nxe4 Rxe4 24 fxe5 Qe8 25 Qh6+ Kf7 26 Nf4 Qxe5 27 Qxg6+ Ke7 28 Nd3 Qd5 and Black manages to hold his bits together) 22 Nxe4 was played in G.Milos-G.Vescovi, Sao Paulo 2004, and now Black should have played 22 ... Rxh1 23 Rxh1 Rxe4 24 fxe5 Qe8 25 Qh6+ Kf7 26 Nf4 Qxe5 27 Qxg6+ Ke7, transposing to the 21 ... Rxh1 continuation) 21 ... dxe5 22 Ne6+ (22 Nde2 Rh3! is fine for Black) 22 ... Bxe6 23 Qxd8 Rxd8 24 Rxd8 Nxe4 and Black has the better chances in the endgame, thanks to his three passed pawns on the kingside, E.Berg-R.Kasimdzhanov, Dresden 2008.

21 Rxh1



Exercise: What is White's threat?

Answer: White threatens 22 e5 and if 22 ... dxe5, then 23 Ne6+ wins the queen. Therefore, Black has to ready himself against that threat.

21 ... Kf7!?

Tournament praxis has also seen 21 ... Qf8 22 f5 gxf5 23 exf5 Kg8 24 Nce2 as played in A.Zapata-J.Guerrero Sierra, Cartagena 2012, and now 24 ... Qg7 25 Qd3 Rc5 26 Nf4 Re5 offers mutual chances.

22 e5

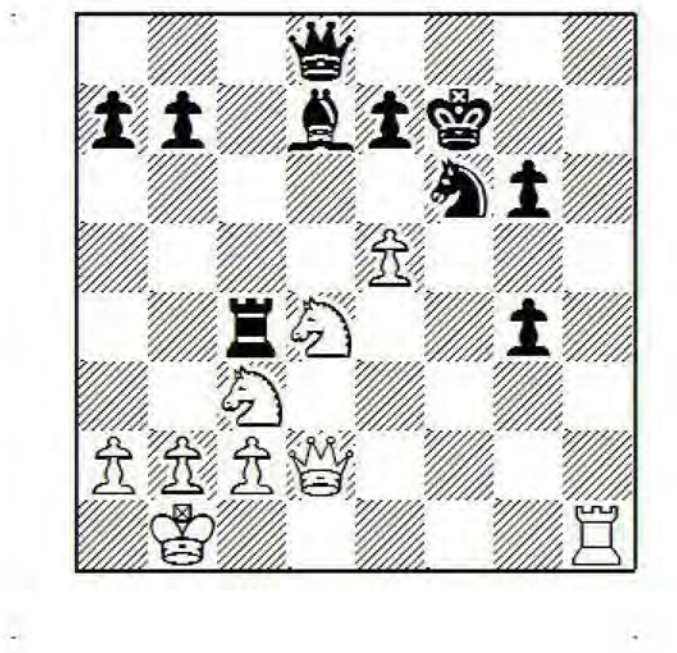
Thrusting the pawn forward anyway! White uses brute force to open up the game, hoping to get at Black's somewhat exposed king.

A look at the alternatives:

a) 22 Qd3 Rc5 23 e5 (23 Qe3 is met with 23 ... Rh5 with an excellent game for Black) 23 ... dxe5 24 Nb3 Rc8 25 fxe5 Bc6 26 Rf1 Qxd3 27 cxd3 Rd8 28 exf6 exf6 and although Black only has two pawns for the piece, the three pawns on the kingside provides him with adequate counterplay, P.Negi-V.Papin, Istanbul 2005.

b) 22 f5?! is considerably weaker. For instance, 22 ... Qg8! 23 Qd3 Rc5 24 Nce2 gxf5 25 exf5 Re5 26 a3 Qg5 leaves Black clearly, if not decisively better, G.Gopal-W.Moranda, Enschede 2009.

22 ... dxe5 23 fxe5



Exercise: What is Black's best move?

Answer: **23 ... Bf5!**

This is the point behind 21 ... Kf7!?. Black extricates himself by 'pinning' the d4-knight and the e4-e5 thrust loses its effectiveness.

24 Rd1

White's knight is not actually pinned down as he could play 24 Nf3 but after 24 ... Qxd2 25 Nxd2 Rxc3! 26 bxc3 Nd5, Black can in essence try for the win with his dangerous g-pawns and White poised to lose more pawns.

24 ... Nd5

As pointed out by Ward, then Black can also consider sacrificing the exchange with 24 ... Rxd4 25 Qxd4 Qxd4 26 Rxd4, and now 26 ... Nd7 leaves Black with a very playable endgame for Black.

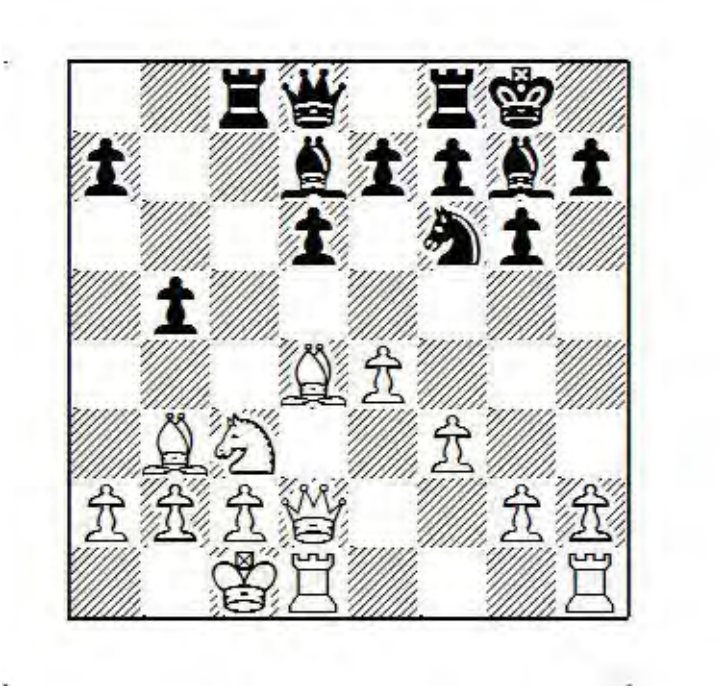
White pretty much forces the draw from here onwards.

25 Qh6 Rxd4 26 Qh7+ Ke6 27 Rxd4 Nxc3+ 28 bxc3 Qb6+ 29 Kc1 Qb5 30 Qg8+ Kxe5 31 Qg7+ Ke6 32 Qg8+ Kf6 33 Qf8+ Ke6 34 Qg8+ ½-½

A truce was agreed here.

Chapter Twelve
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: The Topalov Variation – 11…Nxd4

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 b5



Another recent arrival variation-wise on the Dragon scene is the Topalov Variation, which is named after the Bulgarian Grandmaster and former FIDE World Champion Veselin Topalov. One of the interesting aspects of this is that Topalov, while being possibly the first strong player to play the line back in 1996, has seldom used it ever since. But even so the rest of the world stood up and listened, and since its first outing, countless grandmasters and other strong players have used it, for instance Radjabov, Gashimov, Shirov, Negi, Jones, Tiviakov, Robson, Guseinov, Golubev, as well as Topalov's compatriot Kiril Georgiev. As you can see some if not most of the serious Dragon specialists are on the list, and there are many other strong players too.

The idea behind the variation is that after exchanging the pair of knights, Black will throw his queenside pawns unhindered towards White's castled king. The lines tend to become very concrete and in some of them, the play leads pretty much straight towards a draw, either by repetition, perpetual check or just positionally. This, I'm sure, has a lot to do with the fact that Topalov is no longer playing this line. He most likely wants to have a chance to win, even as Black.

Our variation overview starts when White recaptures with the d4-bishop and Black plays 12 ... b5. In Game 61, White asks the obvious question: what are you going to do, if I just take the a7-pawn? This is, however, not White's most dangerous option. The much sharper and fascinatingly complicated 13 h4 is examined in Game 62. A considerably calmer and far more positional option is 13 Nd5, which is the subject of Game 63.

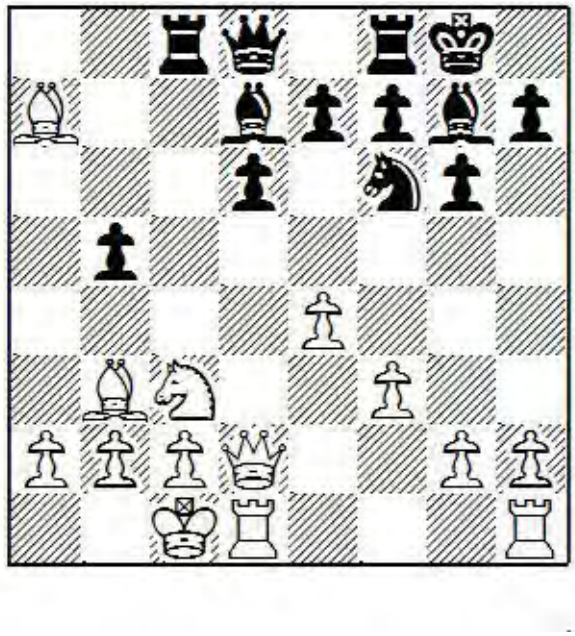
Game 61
A.Czebe-E.Kislik
Budapest 2009

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 b5

Question: So before we get started with the game, let me ask the obvious question. Isn't the a7-pawn hanging?

Answer: Funny, you should ask as that is exactly what we are going to look at first! And yes, it is hanging, but obviously there are consequences for taking the pawn, otherwise this variation would be out of business before it got into business.

13 Bxa7!?



This obvious choice, picking up a pawn, has to be looked at carefully. If White can get away with this move without consequences, then Black cannot play this line.

Aside from the options covered in our other main games, White also has the simplifying move 13 e5 available. After 13 ... dxe5 14 Bxe5 Bc6:

a) White's most popular continuation is the queen trade with 15 Qxd8 Rfxd8 16 Rxd8+ (16 a4 bxa4 17 Bxa4 Bb7 18 Kb1 g5 19 Rhe1 a6 20 h3 h5 21 Bb3 e6 22 Rxd8+ Rxd8 shouldn't represent any problems for Black, P.Anisimov-F.Amonatov, St Petersburg 2009) 16 ... Rxd8 17 Rd1 Bh6+ (or 17 ... Rc8 18 a4 a6 19 axb5 axb5 20 Ne2 Nh5 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 with equality in E.Berg-M.Golubev, Internet 2004) 18 Kb1 Rxd1+ 19 Nxd1 Nh5 20 Nc3 Bf4 21 Bd4 Bxh2 and a draw was agreed in R.Castellanos-V.Gashimov, Calvia 2004.

b) 15 Qe3 Qa5 16 Bxf6?! (16 a3!? e6 is also fine for Black) 16 ... Bxf6 17 Nd5 Bxd5 18 Rxd5 Rfd8 19 Rxd8+ Rxd8 20 f4 Qc7 21 c3 b4 22 Rd1 Rxd1+ 23 Kxd1 bxc3 24 bxc3 Bxc3 and the extra pawn provides Black with excellent winning chances, A.Neiksans-D.Vocaturo, Balaguer 2010.

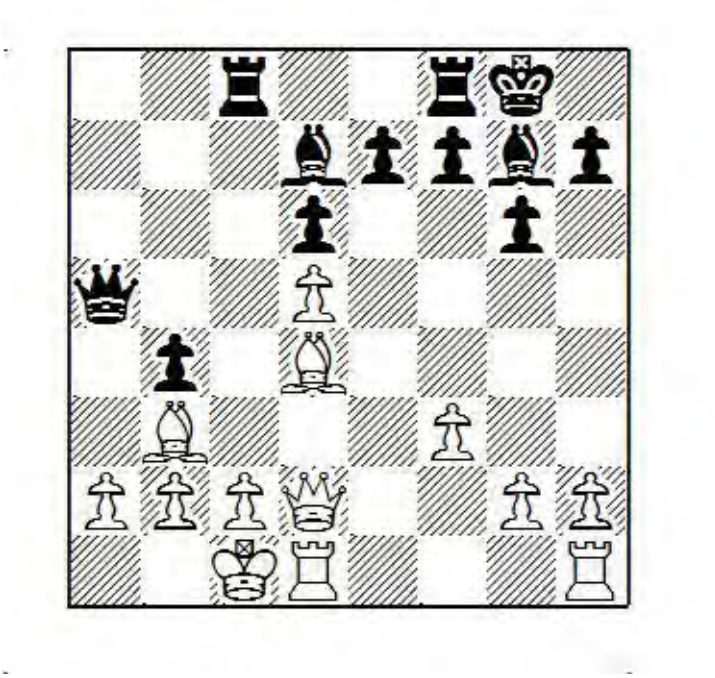
13 ... b4 14 Nd5

The knight retreat 14 Ne2 does White no favours and after 14 ... Qa5 15 Bd4 Ba4 16 Bxa4 (16 Kb1 allows Black to enter a comfortable endgame after 16 ... Bxb3 17 cxb3 Ra8 18 a4 bxa3 19 Qxa5 Rxa5 20 bxa3 Rxa3 21 Kb2 Raa8 22 Nc3 Rfb8 23 e5 dxe5 24 Bxe5 Rb7, F.Bindrich-M.Neubauer, Germany 2011) 16 ... Qxa4 17 Kb1 e5! 18 b3 (or 18 Be3 d5 19 exd5 Nxd5 20 Qxd5 Qxc2+ 21 Ka1 Qxe2 with clearly better chances for Black, M.Azadmanesh-J.Van de Mortel, Amsterdam 1998) 18 ... Qc6 19 Bb2 d5! 20 Bxe5 dxe4 21 Bb2 exf3 22 gxf3 Nd5 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Qxd5 Qxc2+ 25 Ka1 Qxe2 26 Rd2 Qe7 27 Qd4+ Kg8, Black has the better chances thanks to his safer king and better pawn structure, L.Schut-H.Tikkanen, Wijk aan Zee 2012.

14 ... Nxd5 15 exd5 Qa5 16 Qe3!?

This move is now considered White's most accurate continuation.

Previously White tried 16 Bd4 on several occasions.



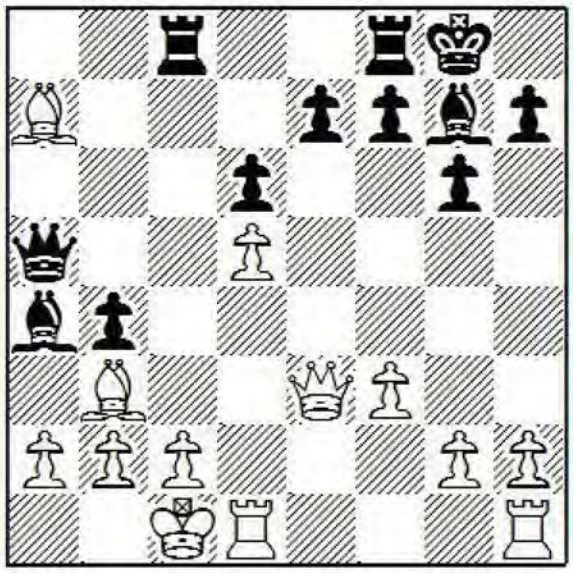
Exercise: What is Black's best move?

Answer: Black has an amazing response available with 16 ... Rxc2+!! 17 Bxc2 (17 Kxc2 fails to 17 ... Bf5+, but sadly for Black, White can play 17 Qxc2! which allows White to hold the balance after 17 ... Rc8 18 Qxc8+ Bxc8 19 Kb1 Bf5+ 20 Ka1 h5 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Rhe1 Kf6 with approximately even chances, R.Niyazmetov-J.Vakhidov, Tashkent 2009) 17 ... Qxa2 and now:

a) 18 Qf2?! Rc8 19 Kd2?? (19 Bxg7 f6! (19 ... Kxg7? 20 Qd4+ is fine for White) 20 Kd2 Qxb2 21 Rc1 b3 22 Qa7 Bb5 23 Ke3 Qc3+ 24 Kf2 Qd2+) 19 ... Rxc2+ 20 Kxc2 Qc4+ 21 Kd2 Bxd4 22 Qe2 (22 Qf1 Bc3+ and White resigned in A.Anarkulov-J.Vakhidov, Tashkent 2011) 22 ... Bc3+ 23 Ke3 Qc5+ 24 Ke4 Bf5+ 25 Kf4 Be5+ 26 Kg5 f6+ 27 Kh4 g5+ and facing imminent mate, White resigned in T.Bakre-B.Kadziolka, Pardubice 2004.

b) 18 Qe3! (relatively best) 18 ... Rc8 19 Kd2 Bxd4?! (this worked amazingly well in this game, but strictly speaking it is not Black's best move, which once again is the rook sacrifice 19 ... Rxc2+ 20 Kxc2 Qc4+ 21 Kd2 Bxd4 22 Qxe7 Bb5 23 Qe4 f5 24 Qe6+ Kg7 25 Qe7+ Kh6 26 Qh4+ with a perpetual check) 20 Qxd4 Rc4 21 Qd3?? (White rewards Black for his tenacity with this blunder as the former could actually claim an edge after 21 Qe3 Qxb2 22 Qb3 Qd4+ 23 Ke2 Qc5 24 Bd3 Bb5 25 Rd2 Rc3 26 Qb1 Qxd5 27 Re1) 21 ... Bf5 22 Ra1 Rxc2+ 23 Ke3 Qxa1 and White is forced to enter a lost endgame in R.Pruijssers-K.Sato, Shenzhen 2011.

16 ... Ba4



Perhaps it doesn't look entirely logical for Black to want the light-squared bishops exchanged, but the b3-bishop kind of glues White's queenside together. The alternative 16 ... Bf5 has been tested several times, but was made look inadequate after 17 Rd2 Ra8 18 Bd4 Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Bd7 20 Re1 Ba4 21 Rde2 Bxb3 22 axb3 and Black's attack no longer seemed threatening in P.Negi-D.Reinderman, Wijk aan Zee 2010.

17 Bd4 Rc7

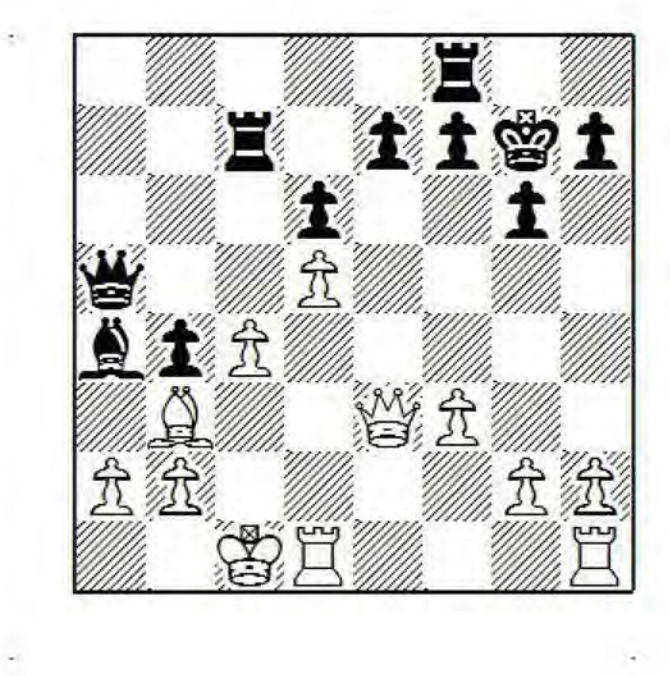
Black has tried several things at this point, but aside from the move in our main game, Black should possibly stick to 17 ... Bxb3!? 18 Qxb3 Rc7 19 Rhe1 Rfc8 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Re2 Qc5 which should not knock White entirely off his horse, but promises approximately even chances. However, in the game L.Perpinya Rofes-Y.Gonzalez Vidal, Badalona 2011, White quickly cracked with 22 a3?! (22 Kb1 looks more solid) 22 ... bxa3 23 Qxa3 Qb6 24 Qd3 Kg8! (avoiding a potential queen-exchanging check on d4) 25 Qd4? (25 Rde1 is relatively best) 25 ... Qa6 26 Rde1?? Rc4 27 Qd3 Qa1+ 28 Kd2 Qxb2 and White threw the towel into the ring.

18 Bxg7 Kxg7

Instead, 18 ... Bxb3!? 19 Qxb3 Kxg7 leads to the same kind of position as in the previous note.

19 Kb1

Aside from this solid and rather obvious-looking move, White has the outright provocative 19 c4!?



Exercise (tactical): Without moving any pieces, why can't Black just take the pawn with 19 ... bxc3 with an even stronger attack?

Answer: 19 ... bxc3?? is met by 20 Qd4+, picking up the a4-bishop. If you missed it, don't beat yourself up. It's an easy tactical point to miss when you have pawns on both b4 and c4 on the board ahead of your calculation.

Black's better alternatives are:

a) 19 ... Bd7 20 g4 e5 21 dxe6 Bxe6 22 Kb1 Qe5 23 Qd4 and White is a bit better.

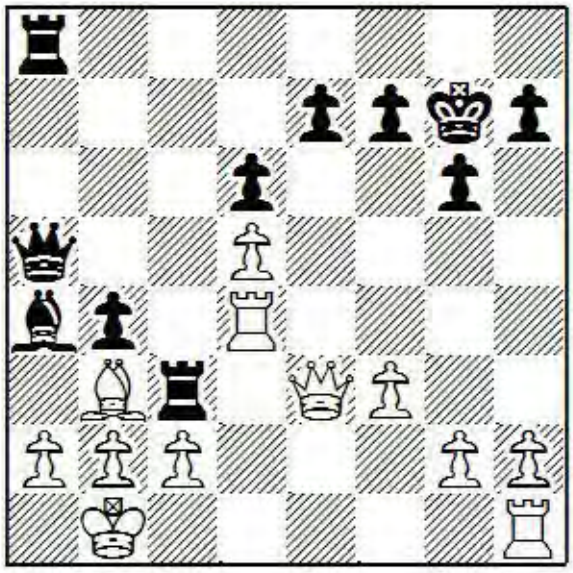
b) Also, 19 ... Rfc8 20 Kb1 Bxb3 21 axb3 looks solid and good for White after 21 ... Ra8 22 Kc2 Qa7 23 Rhe1 h5 24 h4 Qxe3 25 Rxe3 f6.

19 ... Ra8 20 Rd4?

White acts as if Black has absolutely nothing going on attack-wise. A better attempt at keeping the balance is 20 Rhe1 although Black here too is doing well after 20 ... Bxb3 21 Qxb3 Rca7 22 Rd4 Qxa2+ 23 Qxa2 Rxa2 24 Kc1 Ra1+ 25 Kd2 Rxe1 26 Kxe1 Ra1+ 27 Kf2 Rc1 28 Rd2 Rb1 29 b3 Kf6 with an endgame that is likely to be drawn with accurate play, but there is a lot left to play before the players can reach that conclusion.

Exercise: What is Black's best? (Do not worry if you cannot calculate everything to the end!)

Answer: **20 ... Rc3!**



Wow! Even when there's no knight there, Black tossed his rook onto the c3-square.

21 Qxc3!

White should not panic with 21 bxc3?? Bxb3! and it is game over for White after 22 cxb3 (also after 22 Kc1 Qxa2 23 Qd3 Qa1+ 24 Kd2 Qxh1 25 cxb3? Ra2+, there's not much left to play for) 22 ... Qxa2+ 23 Kc1 Qa1+ 24 Kc2 Ra2+ 25 Kd3 Qxc3+ 26 Ke4 f5+ and Black will either mate, win the queen or both!

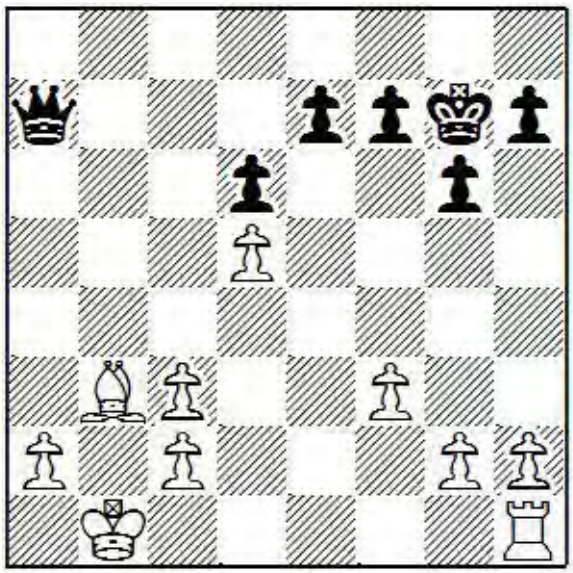
21 ... bxc3 22 Rxa4 Qd8 23 Rxa8?!

The computer doesn't favour this exchange of rooks as it makes it easier for Black to wreak havoc with his queen. With two rooks to guard each other and the pawns, Black will have a harder time penetrating White's position decisively. For example, 23 Re4!? cxb2 24 Rhe1 Ra7 25 Kxb2 Qb6 26 c3 Qc5 27 R1e2 Rb7 28 Kc2 is definitely better for Black but it isn't easy to devise a clear-cut plan for him either.

23 ... Qxa8 24 bxc3

White gets the best out of a problematic situation. In return for the queen, he gets a rook, a bishop and a couple of pawns. However, the bishop is not a particularly strong one and the pawns are a bit messed up and not at all easy to guard.

24 ... Qa7



Question: How should this position be assessed? Black's queen should be stronger than White's rook and tall b3-pawn, right?

Answer: While the material balance nominally is about even, the greater mobility of the queen should promise Black an advantage. But Black has to be careful too as the combination of the passed a-pawn and the rook plus bishop duo can easily cause headaches. Therefore Black has to try to win some pawns and create a passed pawn on the kingside to keep White's pieces busy before the a-pawn becomes an incurable pain.

25 a4

A reasonable alternative is 25 Kb2, intending to send the rook all the way over to a1, behind the a-pawn and after 25 ... Qf2 26 g3 Qg2 27 Ra1 Qxh2 28 g4 h5 29 gxh5 Qxh5 30 Rf1 Qe5 31 Rd1 Qe3 32 Rd3 Qb6 33 a4 f5, Black definitely has every chance of winning the game even though it might not be easy to realise that.

25 ... Qf2

Black goes hunting for pawns.

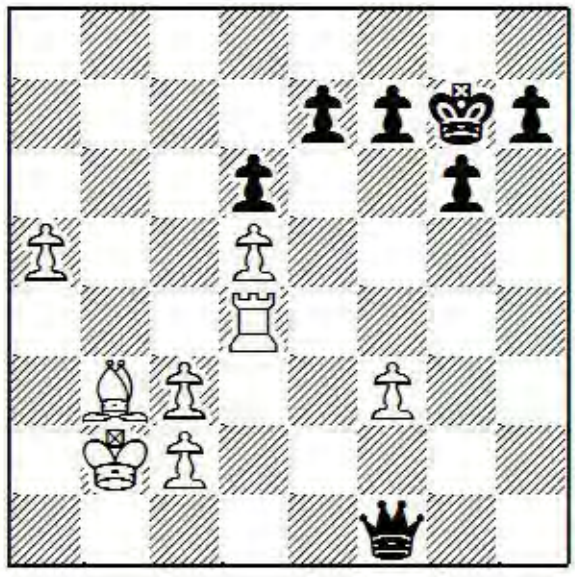
26 Rd1

Realising that he is not able to salvage all the kingside pawns, White puts the rook on a useful square and hopes for the best. Trying to distract Black with 26 a5 only loses White's vital trump and leaves Black with a winnable position after 26 ... Qc5 27 Kb2 Qxa5 28 Rd1 Qa6 29 Rd3 g5.

26 ... Qxg2 27 Kb2 Qxh2 28 a5 Qe2

This is most likely wrong, considering that White has some pretty decent of steering the game towards a draw. However, it is hard to fault Black for playing how he does and for not finding the computer-approved continuation, which runs 28 ... Qh3 29 a6 Qd7 30 Rd4 Qa7 31 Bc4 h5 32 Bf1 g5 33 Rb4 Kf6 34 Rb7 Qa8 35 Rc7 Qb8+ 36 Rb7 Qc8 and this is not a clear win either.

29 Rd3 Qf2 30 Rd4 Qf1



31 Bc4

White has a rather clever option at this point with 31 Rc4 and now 31 ... Qg1 (this forces Black to consider 31 ... Qxf3 32 a6 Qxd5 33 a7 Qa8 34 Ra4 h5 35 Bd5 Qxd5 36 a8Q Qxa8 37 Rxa8 with a fascinating endgame that is typically seen in the lines covered in Chapter 10) is simply met by 32 Rd4 Qf1 33 Rc4 and we can look at a repetition of moves.

31 ... Qh3 32 a6 Qd7

Instead, 32 ... Qc8 33 Bf1 h5 34 Rb4 Qa8 35 Ra4 Qa7 leads to a similar position as in the game and the note after Black's 35th move.

33 Bf1 h5 34 Rb4 Kf6 35 Rb7 Qa4

Black doesn't get anywhere after 35 ... Qc8 36 Rb4 (36 Bb5? h4! should be winning for Black) 36 ... Qa8 37 Rf4+ Kg7 (or 37 ... Kg5 38 Rxf7 Qa7) 38 Ra4 Qa7 and Black's progress has stalled.

36 Rb3?!

Pushing the pawn forward with 36 a7! is more accurate as after 36 ... h4 37 f4 Qa5 38 c4 Qa6 39 Rd7 Qb6+, a draw by repetition is reached.

36 ... Qd7

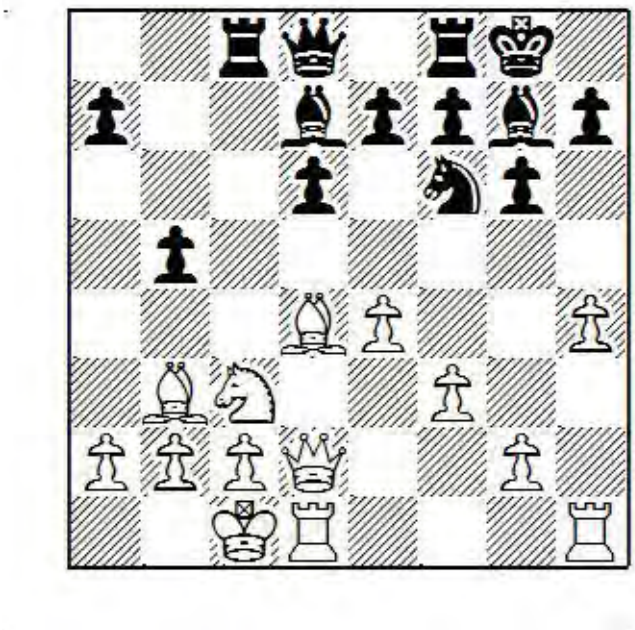
Black can be a little more daring at this juncture, playing for the win with 36 ... Qa5 37 Rb7 Qxd5 38 Rc7 h4 39 a7 g5 40 c4 Qa8 41 c5 dxc5 42 Bd3 Qd5 43 Be4 Qe5+ 44 Kb3 Qxc7 45 a8Q and Black, with his pawns, should have the better chances although it is by no means certain that he is winning.

37 Rb7 Qa4 38 Rb3 Qd7 39 f4 h4 ½-½

Neither side is getting anywhere so a truce is declared.

Game 62
J.Polgar-G.Jones
London (rapid) 2013

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rc8 11 Bb3 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 b5 13 h4



White heads towards the intense complications that are a natural result of both sides launching their pawn attacks. The previous main game featured 13 Bxa7 and 13 e5, while the next main game covers 13 Nd5.

13 ... a5

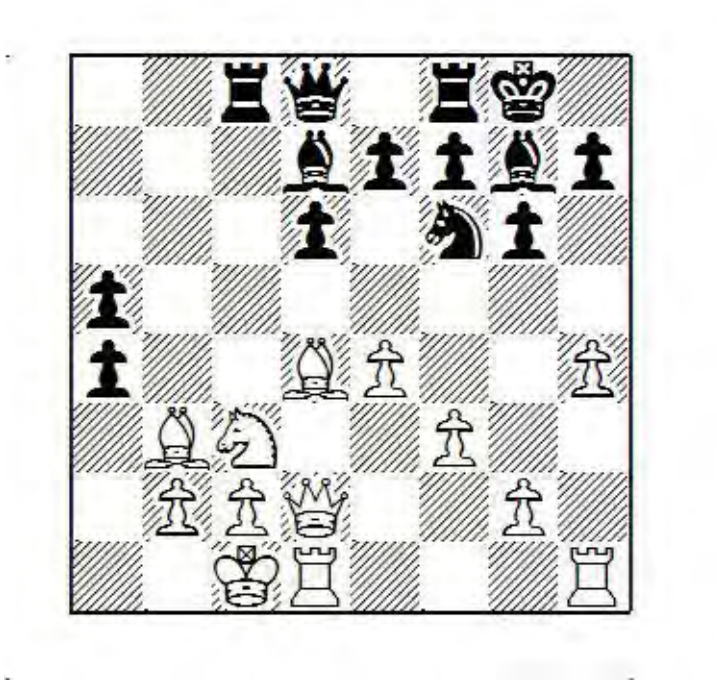
It is seems entirely reasonable to ask why Black shouldn't throw in 13 ... h5 to stem the tide of White's kingside pawn storm, just as in the Soltis Variation that we covered in Chapter 10. In Y.Ranola-M.Kazhgaleyev, Manila 2010, Black managed to win after 14 g4 (14 e5!? dxe5 15 Bxe5 Bf5 16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 17 Rxd8+ Rxd8 18 Nxb5 is the critical test of Black's idea and although Black has some compensation, I don't feel it is entirely enough) 14 ... a5 15 gxh5 Nxh5 16 Rdg1 (16 Rhg1!?, keeping the other rook on the d-file, makes more sense) 16 ... e6 17 Rg5 Bxd4 (my computer likes 17 ... a4 better, but it might not please win-seekers as it ends up in a perpetual check after 18 Bxg7 Nxg7 19 h5 Qf6 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 Nd5 exd5 22 Bxd5+ Ne6 23 Rhg1 Kf7 24 Rxg6 Qxg6 25 Rxg6 Kxg6 26 Qh2 Nf4 27 Qg3+ Kh5 28 Qh2+ Kg6 29 Qg3+ and Black cannot avoid the checks without giving up at least a piece) 18 Qxd4 Qf6 19 Qxf6 Nxf6 20 a3 Kg7 21 Rd1 a4 22 Ba2 and now 22 ... Rh8 (or 22 ... Ne8) 23 Nxb5 d5 leads to

an interesting position, where Black cannot be worse.

14 h5

Alternatives, which focus on holding Black's pawns at bay have also been tested:

a) 14 a4? is simply a mistake and we take a look at 14 ... bxa4:



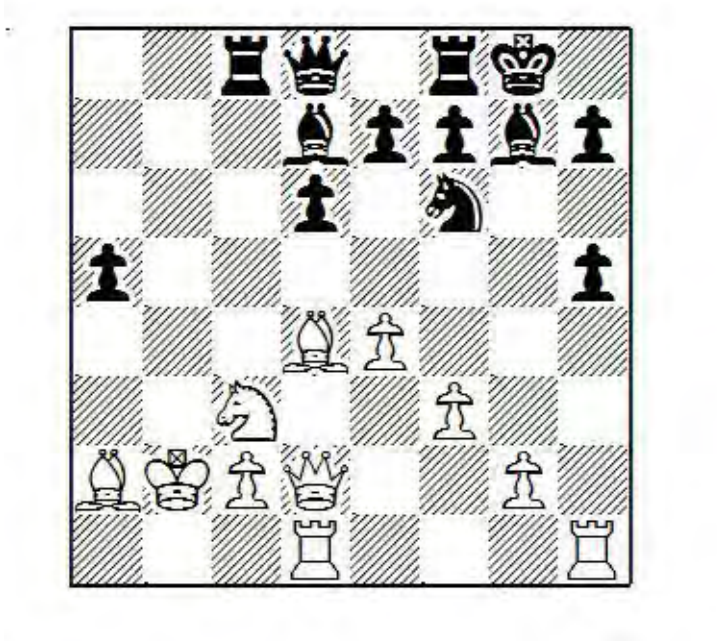
Exercise (tactical): What happens if White recaptures on a4?

Answer: Doing so accelerates Black's attack into dangerous proportions no matter whether White capture with either minor piece:

a1) 15 Nxa4 Bxa4 16 Bxa4 Rc4! Black now threatens both bishops. The one on a4 is unguarded, and the one on d4 is compromised due to a simple tactic. After17 Bb3 Nxe4! 18 Qe3 Rxd4 19 Rxd4 Ng3 (Black plays this perfectly to minimise any attacking compensation White may be dreaming of for the lost pawn) 20 Rdd1 Nxh1 21 Rxh1 Qb8!, Black has won a pawn with an attack still in hand (with the immediate threat of ... a5-a4), H.Hunt-I.Gaponenko, Warsaw 2001.

a2) 15 Bxa4 Bxa4 16 Nxa4 Rc4 17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 b3 Rxa4 19 bxa4 Qb6 20 Rdf1 Rc8 21 Kd1 Qb2 22 h5 Rc4 23 c3 Qb3+ 24 Ke2 Bxc3 25 Rb1 Qxb1 26 Rxb1 Bxd2 27 Kxd2 Kg7 and White has a lost ending.

a3) The retreat 15 Ba2 is no better as after 15 ... a3 16 h5 axb2+ 17 Kxb2, as played in I.Ortiz Suarez-L.Ibarra Chami, Villahermosa 2014, now 17 ... gxh5! looks completely counterintuitive but gives Black a clear advantage.



The knight on f6 holds things together quite nicely and White would not willingly exchange on f6 anytime soon. Black has a clear advantage here.

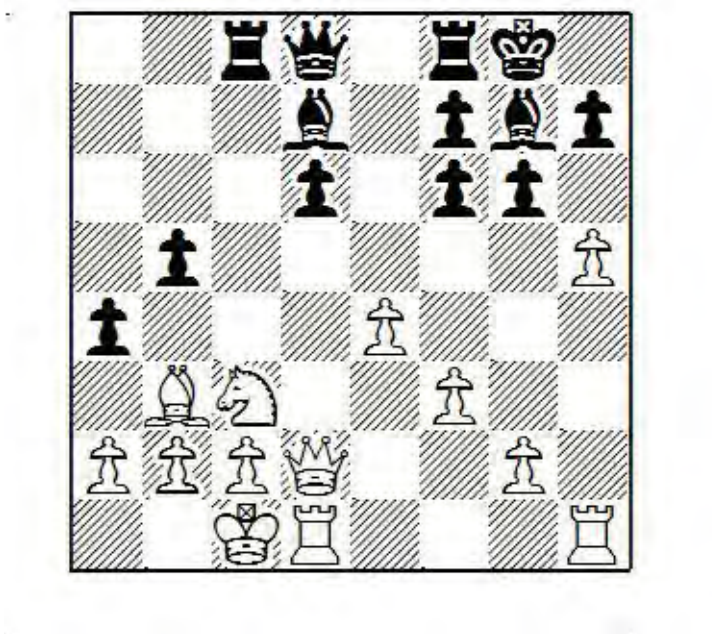
b) Less compromising is 14 a3 b4 15 axb4 axb4 16 Nd5 Ra8 (16 ... Nxd5 is an interesting option 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 exd5 Qa5 19 Qd4+ Kg8 20 h5 Bf5 21 Kd2 Rc5 22 Ke3? (22 hxg6 Bxg6 23 Ra1 Qc7 24 Ke1 Rc8 is the most accurate for both sides) 22 ... Bxc2 23 Bxc2 Rxc2 24 hxg6 e5! and the grandmaster behind the white pieces was quite lucky to escape with a draw against his 300-point lower-rated opponent, I.Saric-O.Kanmazalp, Sarajevo 2010) 17 Nxf6+ Bxf6 18 Qxb4 Rb8 19 Qc3 Bxd4 20 Qxd4 Qa5 21 h5 Rb4 (the immediate 21 ... gxh5 is also a possibility) 22 Qe3 gxh5 (for obvious reasons, the American grandmaster wasn't particularly attracted to 22 ... g5 23 e5 h6 24 e6 Bxe6 25 Bxe6 fxe6 26 Qxe6+ Rf7 27 Kb1 Qa3 28 Qa2 Qxa2+ 29 Kxa2 and Black is just a pawn down) 23 Qc3 Rc8 (here Black could have considered 23 ... Qa1+ 24 Kd2 Qa5 25 Ke1 Be6 26 Bxe6 fxe6 with chances for both sides) 24 Rd5 Qxd5 25 Qxc8+ Bxc8 26 Bxd5 Rb5 27 Kd2 e6 28 Bc4 Rg5 29 Rh2 Kg7 and White has the clearly better chances in the endgame thanks to his b-pawn and better pawn structure, D.Swiercz-R.Robson, Moscow 2012.

14 ... a4

Black has to take up the challenge and push White to a decision regarding her light-squared bishop before the kingside attack really gains wind in the sails.

15 Bxf6 Bxf6

a) The hideous 15 ... exf6!? is not as bad as it looks.



While it obviously leaves the d6-pawn seriously weakened, the pawn-shield in front of the king gets fortified. Let's not forget that the white bishop has to move to d5 and block the attack against the weak d-pawn. After 16 Bd5, Black has tried several logical continuations:

a1) It is hard to argue against the logic of 16 ... b4, continuing to push the pawns forward and 17 Ne2 was played in M.Petr-L.Voloshin, Marianske Lazne 2006. Here Black should have opted for 17 ... f5!? 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 Qxb4 (19 Nd4 a3 is fine for Black) 19 ... Qg5+ (safest, whereas 19 ... Rb8 20 Qxd6 Be6 21 Qxd8 Bxb2+ 22 Kd2 Rfxd8 23 c4 a3 is probably also playable, if a little messy) 20 Qd2 Qf6, and since now both 21 Nc3 and 21 c3 are met with 21 ... a3, undermining White's defence, White has to accept the repetition of moves with 21 Qd4 Qg5+ 22 Qd2 Qf6.

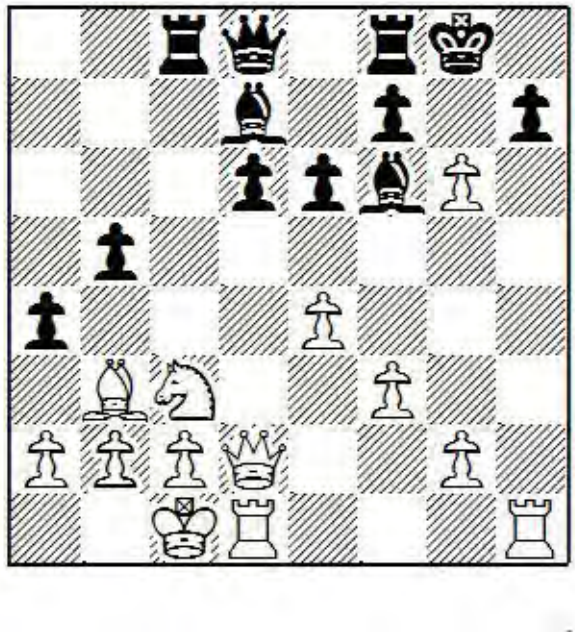
a2) 16 ... f5 opening up for the bishop looks logical and after 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 g4!? (in an earlier game, White tried 18 exf5 b4 19 fxg6 bxc3 20 gxf7+ Rxf7 21 Bxf7+ Kxf7 22 Qxd6?? cxb2+ 23 Kb1 Bf5 24 Qf4 Qf6 25 Qxa4 Qc3 26 Rd3 Qxd3! and Black wins in I.Ortiz Suarez-D.Vocaturo, Havana 2011) 18 ... fxg4 19 fxg4 Be6 20 Bxe6 fxe6 21 Qh2 Qg5+ 22 Kb1 as played in Wei Yi-Pham Chuong, Ho Chi Minh City 2013, here Black could have reached a fully playable position with 22 ... Qe5 23 Qh7+ Kf7 24 Rh6 g5 25 Rg6 a3.

a3) 16 ... a3 17 hxg6 (17 Bb3!? is possibly better, intending to meet 17 ... axb2+ with 18 Kb1 and it is White's turn to attack) 17 ... hxg6, and in M.Kravtsiv-G.Joshi, New Delhi 2012, White now played the

crude 18 Rh6?! (18 Bb3 and 18 Kb1 are more solid alternatives) against which Black should played 18 ... axb2+ 19 Kxb2 (19 Kb1 Qa5 20 Rdh1 g5 and with the threat of 21 Rh8+! Bxh8 22 Qh6 eliminated, Black should be close to winning) 19 ... b4 20 Ne2 f5+ 21 e5 Qe7 22 Rxg6 Qxe5+ 23 Nd4 f4 and Black's initiative is far stronger than White's.

b) For obvious reasons, 15 ... axb3? is way too dangerous as after 16 Bxg7 bxa2 17 Qh6 a1Q+ 18 Kd2, Black is hopelessly lost despite having an extra queen for a minor piece.

16 hxg6 e6!



Black cannot recapture on g6 because of 17 Qh6 and it's curtains. Capturing the bishop also doesn't impress as after 16 ... axb3 17 Qh6 Bg5+ (the only move to distract the white queen from mating the king) 18 Qxg5 fxg6 19 axb3 Rf7 20 Nd5, Black is a pawn down while White all the play as well. The text move, 16 ... e6!, is rather clever. Not only does it trap White's light-squared bishop, it also prevents White's big threat, 17 Qh6, on account of the nasty 17 ... Bg5+ that wins the queen. Finally, Black would not mind if White played 17 gxh7+ as after 17 ... Kh8 as it will take some effort for White to start generating new threats against the king.

17 e5

Question: Why is White throwing pawns away?

Answer: Well, for starters it cannot really be taken right away as after 17 ... Bxe5?? 18 Qh6, Black no longer has 18 ... Bg5+ available. Also, 17 ... dxe5 18 Ne4! (threatening Qh6 again) 18 ... fxg6 19 Qh6 Rf7 20 Bxe6 leaves White with an easy day at the office.

The terribly obvious-looking 17 Rxh7?! only helps White to get into trouble after 17 ... axb3 18 Rdh1? (18 Qxd6 is relatively best, although 18 ... bxa2 19 Nxa2 Qc7! 20 Qxc7 Rxc7 21 Rxf7 Rxf7 22 gxf7+ Kxf7 can only be better for Black) 18 ... fxg6 19 axb3 Be8 20 Kb1 Rf7 21 Rxf7 (note that 21 Qh6 Rxh7 22 Qxh7+ Kf8 leaves White very little hope of continuing the attack) 21 ... Kxf7 22 Qf4 Kg8 23 Ne2 Qc7 24 c3 Bg7, leaving White with insufficient wood for a minor piece, A.Escobar Forero-K.Kiewra, Barcelona 2012.

17 ... Bg7!

Also, 17 ... Bg5!? has proven to be playable and after 18 f4 axb3? (this is definitely wrong, but you possibly have to be a computer to see the joy in 18 ... fxg6 19 fxg5 axb3 20 axb3 Ra8 21 exd6 Ra1+ 22 Nb1 Qa8 which my computer estimates as close to even, despite Black being two pawns down, as Black threatens 23 ... Qa2) 19 g7! Kxg7 20 fxg5 bxa2 21 Nxa2, Black likely to be lost.

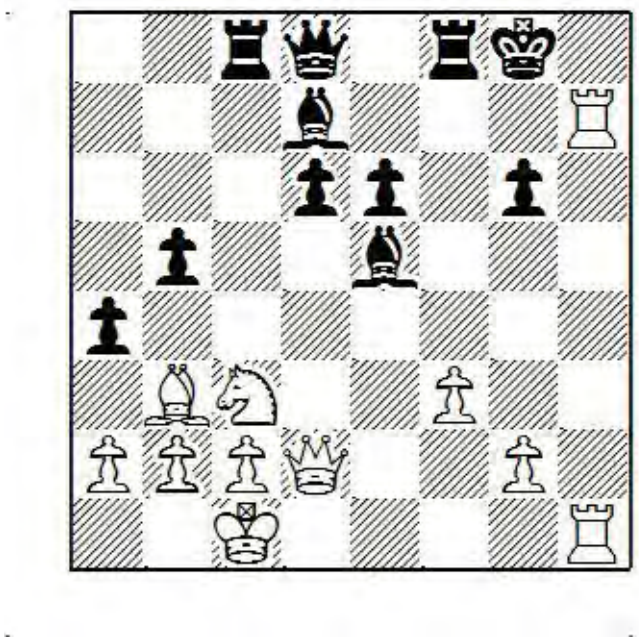
18 Rxh7 Bxe5!?

Massive mayhem follows after 18 ... fxg6 though after19 Rxg7+ Kxg7 20 Qxd6 Qg5+ 21 Kb1 Rf7 22 Bxe6 Rc6 23 Bxf7 Rxd6 24 Rxd6 Bf5 25 g4 Bxc2+ 26 Kxc2 Kxf7 27 e6+ Ke7 28 Rd5 Qe3 29 Rd7+ Kf8 30 e7+ Kf7 31 Ne4 Qe2+ 32 Kc1 Qe1+ 33 Kc2 Qe2+, a draw by repetition is reached.

19 Rdh1

White simply threatens 20 Rh8+ Bxh8 21 Rxh8+ Kxh8 22 Qh6+ Kg8 23 Qh7 mate.

19 ... fxg6



Exercise: Can White save the b3-bishop?

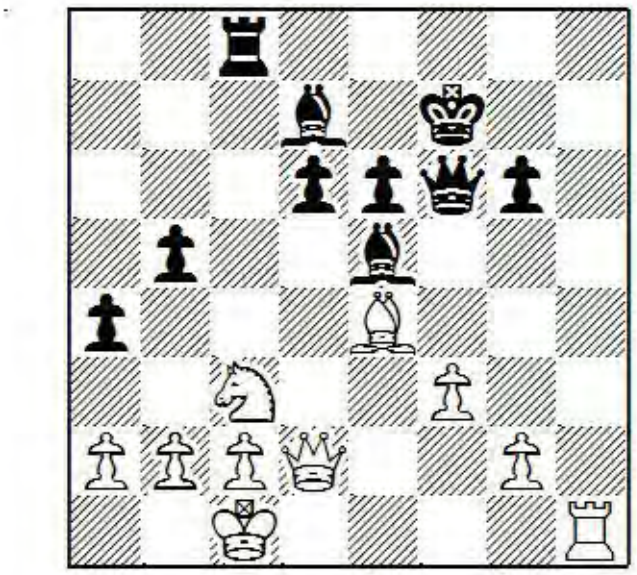
20 Bd5!?

Answer: Oh yes she can! The capture 20 ... exd5 is of course not possible due to 21 Qxd5+ with mate to follow. Alternatively, White could have pulled the emergency brake and gone for the draw by perpetual check with 20 Rh8+ Bxh8 21 Rxh8+ Kxh8 22 Qh6+ Kg8 23 Qxg6+ Kh8 24 Qh6+.

20 ... Rf7 21 Rxf7?!

While it looks perfectly natural to remove one of the few defenders Black has guarding his king, this move is quite probably inaccurate. Through the exchange, White also removes one of his own primary attacking pieces, leaving the attack with nowhere to go. However, since this is a rapid game, we should not be overly judgmental regarding the decisions made at this point and the remainder of the game, and several less than precise moves are being made. At this juncture, my silicon friend recommends 21 R7h6 Qf6 22 Ne4 Qf5 23 g4 Qxf3 24 Rxg6+ Rg7 25 Nf6+ Qxf6 26 Rxf6 Bxf6 27 Kb1 (... Bg5 was threatened) 27 ... exd5 28 Qxd5+ Rf7 29 g5 Rc5 30 Qa8+ Rc8 31 Qd5 Rc5 with a draw by repetition.

21 ... Kxf7 22 Be4 Qf6

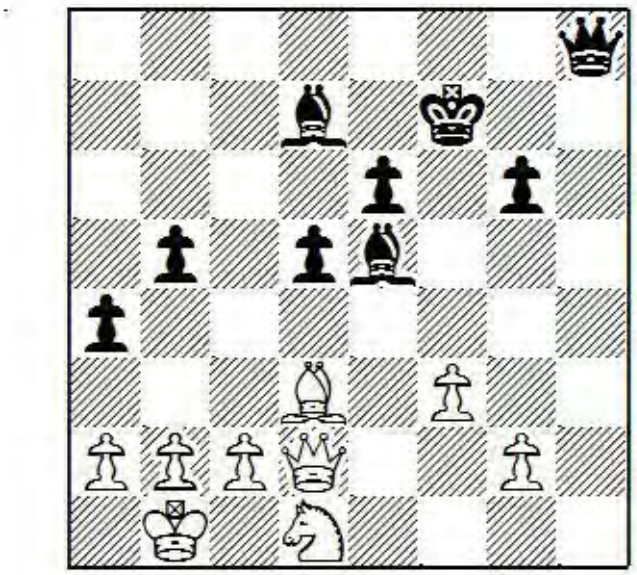


As we can see, White not only removed a defender, but he also took off an attacker, and all of a sudden, Black has grabbed the initiative, putting White under pressure.

23 Kb1

White has to get away from threat of ... Bf4. Another idea is 23 g3 to challenge Black's total domination over the dark squares with 23 ... Kg8 (23 ... Bxg3 is also possible but allows White to activate her pieces) 24 Qh6 Be8 25 Bd3 d5 and Black has some initiative, thanks to his nicely coordinated pieces and space advantage.

23 ... Rh8 24 Rxh8 Qxh8 25 Nd1 d5 26 Bd3



Having to defend this in a rapid game no less with limited time to find the right moves is indeed an unenviable task. Black does not even need to play the most accurate moves as long as he maintains the initiative. A defensive collapse or just several weak or inaccurate moves will quickly end the game.

26 ... Qh4

Activating the queen, while laying claim to the dark squares across the board.

27 a3 Bd6

Black hints that he intends ... b5-b4 which may or may not be a problem for White, but she needs to

decide what to do.

28 c3

Stopping ... b5-b4, but perhaps better is 28 Nf2!?, intending to send the knight to the g4-square to contest some dark squares. A possible continuation is 28 ... b4 29 axb4 Bxb4 30 c3 Bd6 31 Ng4 and White should not be any worse.

28 ... Bf4 29 Qe2 Qh1

Once again, not threatening anything of consequence, but maintaining the initiative.

30 Bc2?!

Now this is a little too passive. It is good to keep the bishop on d3 to remind Black that if he careless, White may pick up the b-pawn.

30 ... e5

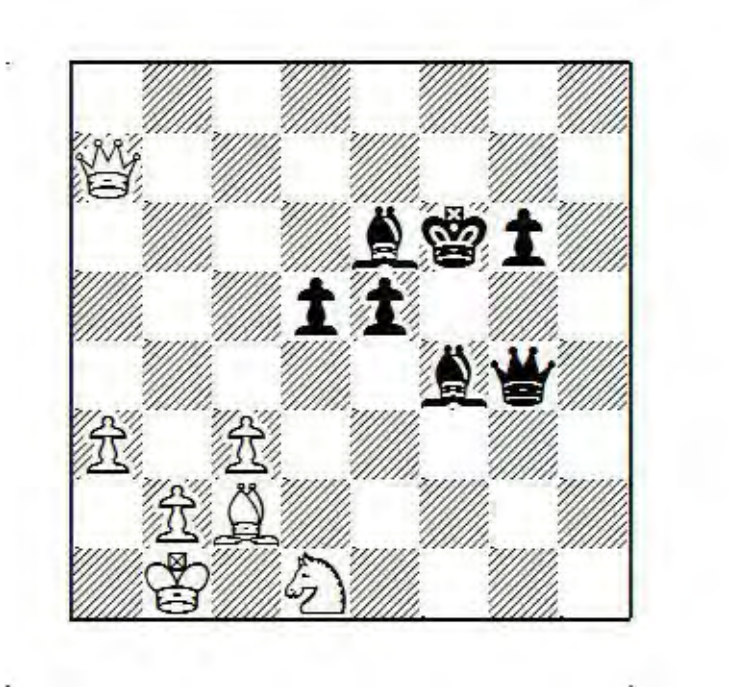
My engine favours 30 ... Qg1!?, claiming an edge in the endgame after 31 Qf2 Qxf2 32 Nxf2 Bg3 33 Nd3 g5 34 Kc1 Ke7. This may well be true, but White should be able to defend.

31 g4 Be6

Also, 31 ... Bc6 keeping both pawns guarded makes a lot of sense too.

32 Qxb5 Qxf3 33 Qxa4 Qxg4 34 Qa7+ Kf6

After the exchanges, Black who has the bishop pair and the more advanced pawns, should be better. But my computer tells me to be a little more objective, that White isn't even worse in this position, which is hard to believe. That being said, it is easier to play Black and as we shall see in the remainder of the game, that makes a huge difference.



35 a4?

Sending the pawn forward must be the logical continuation, but it turns out to be a mistake. Here White should have preferred the not entirely obvious 35 Qb6! and after 35 ... Qe2, then 36 Nf2 should prove okay for White following 36 ... e4 37 Bd1 Qf1 38 Ka2 and it is difficult for Black to make any progress.

35 ... Qe2 36 Qg1?!

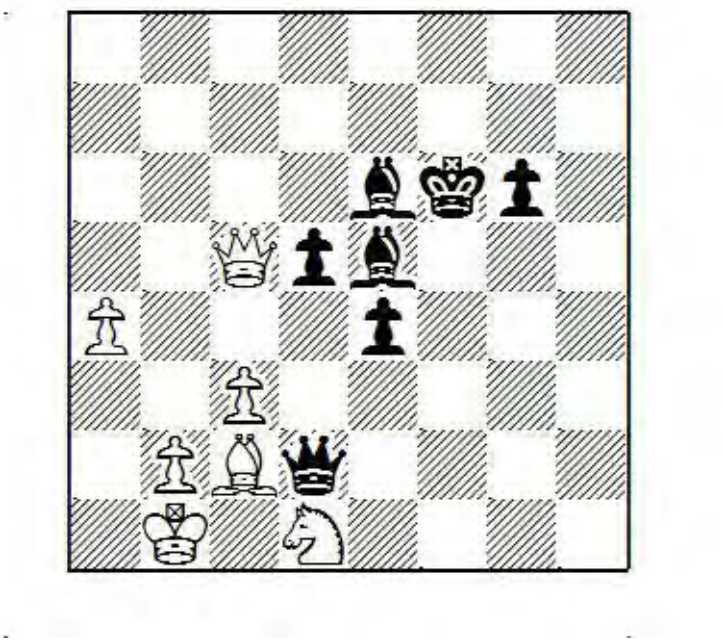
Instead, 36 Qb6, keeping the queen ready to support the advance of the a-pawn was better, but I can imagine the players being very short on time at this point.

36 ... e4?!

White is not the only one to play inaccurately. Here, 36 ... g5!? or 36 ... Bf5!? 37 Bxf5 Kxf5 would have been better options.

37 Qd4+ Be5 38 Qc5 Qd2?!

This logical-looking move jeopardises everything. The most accurate continuation would have been 38 ... Bf4 but even then, 39 Qd4+ Kf5 40 Bb3 Qd2 41 a5 g5 42 a6 Qxd4 43 cxd4 Bb8 is not a certain win as after 44 Nc3 Bc8 45 Bxd5 Bxa6 46 Bxe4+ Kf4, there is still a lot of work left to be done.



39 a5?

White's last chance is 39 Qf8+ Bf7 and 40 c4! messes with Black's control over the game. For instance, after 40 ... dxc4 41 Qh8+ Ke6 42 Qc8+ Ke7 43 Qb7+ Kf8 44 Qxe4 Bf6 45 Qf3 Kg7 46 Nc3, Black's winning chances have been significantly reduced.

39 ... Bf4 40 Bb3

Forcing an exchange of queens with 40 Qd4+ Qxd4 41 cxd4 leaves White without many chances of being able to create confusion or even to stop the march of the g-pawn.

40 ... e3 41 Qf8+ Bf7 42 Nxe3 Qxe3 43 Bxd5?

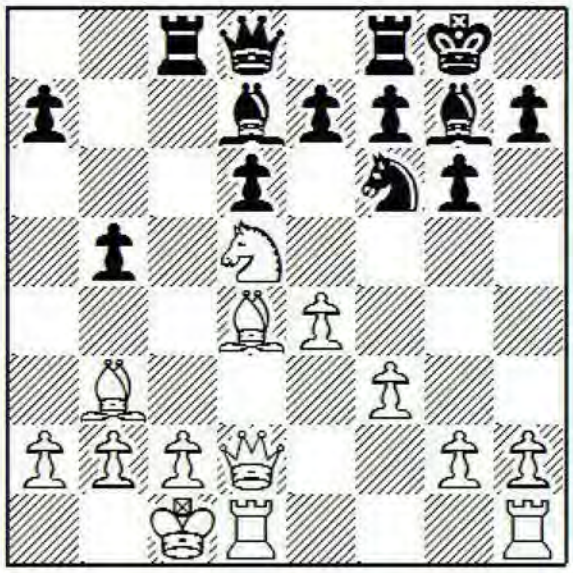
The last mistake that ends the game definitively. Obviously 43 Qb4 Qe4+ 44 Qxe4 dxe4 isn't much of a chance either.

43 ... Qd3+ 0-1

Winning the piece and forcing mate.

Game 63
S.Ganguly-P.Konguvel
Dresden 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 Bb3 Rc8 11 0-0-0 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 b5 13 Nd5



Question: This looks pretty tame. What is White's idea with this move?

Answer: This is positional treatment of this line. White wants to exchange some minor pieces and apply pressure on the semi-open e-file (as well as possibly on the kingside if the chance arises).

13 ... Nxd5 14 Bxg7

Exchanging on g7 has proven to be the only reliable way to play for an advantage. The immediate recaptures on d5, however, are less reliable:

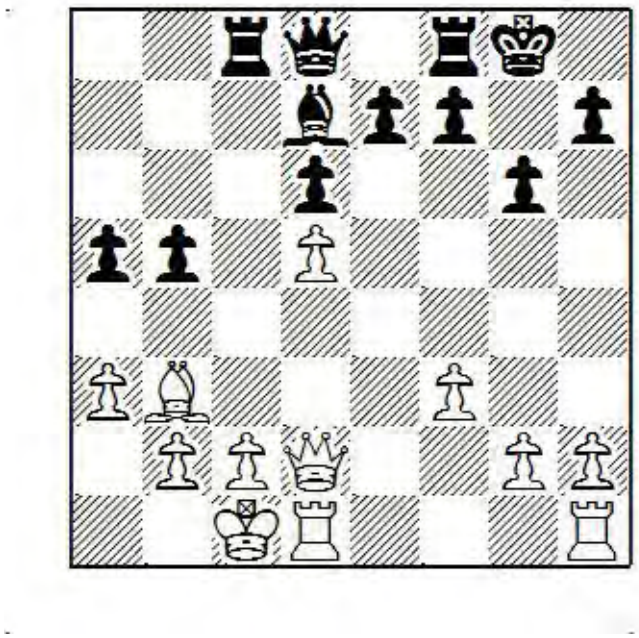
a) 14 Bxd5 Bxd4 15 Qxd4 a5! (15 ... Qc7 16 c3 a5 17 Kb1 Qc5 18 Rhe1 Rfd8 was played in an earlier game, N.Short-V.Topalov, Novgorod 1996, where Black obviously didn't have any problems either) 16 a3 Qc7 17 c3 (17 Rd2 runs into a similar response as after 17 ... b4 18 axb4 axb4 19 Qxb4 e6 20 Ba2 Ra8 21 Bb1 Ra6, White needs to think about how to pull the emergency brake before things get really ugly) 17 ... b4! 18 axb4, Z.Hracek-T.Markowski, Budapest 2000, and now 18 ... axb4 19 Qxb4 Rb8 20 Qa3 e6 21 Bb3 Bc6 22 Bc2 d5 and things are really getting problematic for White.

b) 14 exd5 Bxd4 15 Qxd4 a5 16 a3 b4 17 axb4 (attempting to close the queenside with 17 a4 does not work either and17 ... Qe8 18 h4 Bxa4 19 Kb1 Bxb3 20 cxb3 a4 21 h5 was the top flight encounter A.Shirov-V.Topalov, Moscow 2001, and here Black should have played 21 ... Qd7! (eyeing a potentially nasty check on f5) 22 hxg6 fxg6 23 Rde1 Qf5+ 24 Qe4 axb3 25 Qxf5 Rxf5 26 Rxe7 Rc2, and Black's initiative carries over into the endgame largely due White's back rank issues) 17 ... axb4 18 Qxb4 Rb8 19 Qc3 Qb6 20 Rd4 Ra8 21 Re1 Rfc8 22 Bc4 Ra1+ 23 Kd2 Rxe1 24 Kxe1 e5 25 dxe6 Bxe6 26 Qd3 Bxc4 27 Rxc4 Qg1+ 28 Kd2 was played in E.Hermansson-P.Carlsson, Sweden 2006, where Black now pursued a perpetual check. Instead, he could have gone for 28 ... Qxg2+ 29 Kc3 Rxc4+ 30 Kxc4 Qxh2 with an extra pawn in the queen ending, although the exact outcome of this is difficult to assess.

14 ... Kxg7 15 exd5

You can forgive White for wanting to give his bishop some air with 15 Bxd5 but this will lead to other troubles following 15 ... a5 16 a3 Qc7 17 Kb1 b4 18 axb4 axb4 19 Bb3 Qa5 20 Qd4+ f6 and White soon lost in I.Ortiz Suarez-V.Gashimov, Ourense 2009.

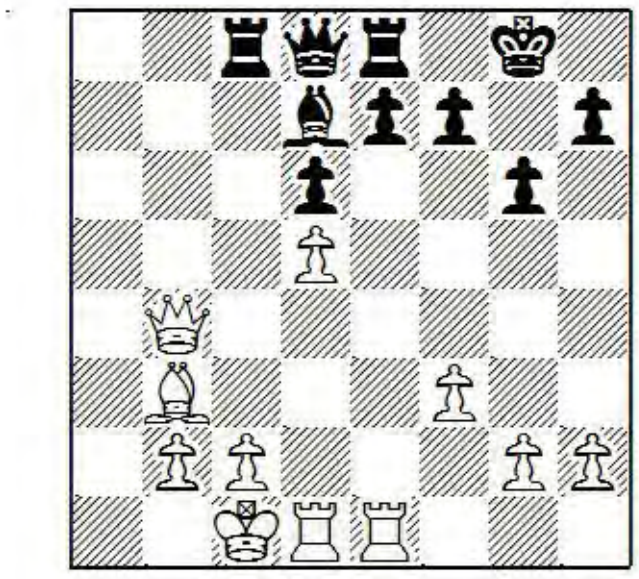
15 ... a5 16 a3 Kg8!?



Question: I don't understand this. We are about to have a situation with pawns storming towards the combatants' kings on opposite wings and Black clearly has a head start. So why is he playing this odd retreating move?

Answer: This is a pre-emptive strike to take the possibility of a check away from White. It can seem strange that Black wants to invest a tempo in this, but the argument is that White will eventually run out of useful moves, place a piece where it is not desperately needed, and then Black proceeds with the pawn sacrifice on b4.

Previously, Black sacrificed the pawn immediately with 16 ... b4 17 axb4 axb4 18 Qxb4 Kg8 19 Rhe1 (19 Kd2 to evacuate the king is not a practical solution either following 19 ... e5 20 h4 Qf6 21 Rde1 h5 22 Qe4, M.Perez Candelario-O.Korneev, Zaragoza 2004, and now 22 ... Rb8! intending ... Rfc8 and ... Bf5 is unpleasant for White) 19 ... Re8 and White has two plausible rook lifts:



a) 20 Rd4 Rb8!? (20 ... Rc5 is often seen as well, but it has proven difficult for Black to keep afloat in this line; the initiative runs out fairly quickly) 21 Qd2 Qb6 22 Kd1 was played in V.Kotronias-R.Pert, Hastings 2005, but now I think Black should try 22 ... Qa6!? 23 Rh4 (provoking a weakness in Black's pawn shield) 23 ... h5 24 Rhe4 Qa1+ 25 Qc1 Qa7 and White will have hard time improving his position as his king is stuck in the middle.

b) 20 Re3 Rb8 21 Qd4 Qa5 22 Bc4 has been tested in a number of correspondence games that all have turned out favourable for White and Black's best is possibly 22 ... Qa1+ 23 Kd2 Qa5+ 24 Qc3 Qb6 25 Rde1 Bb5 26 Rxe7 (26 Bb3 Rb7 is fine for Black) 26 ... Rxe7 27 Rxe7 Bxc4 28 Qxc4 Qxb2 with an extra

pawn for White though his king is once again stuck precariously in the centre. It will therefore be difficult to use the pawn for anything meaningful.

17 Rhe1 Rc5 18 Re3

While tested in a high-octane encounter, this rook lift is completely harmless for Black. The alternatives do not test Black too much either:

a) 18 g4 b4!? (even 18 ... f5!? can be considered, but Black normally would not want to play like this unless absolutely necessary) 19 axb4 axb4 20 Qxb4 Qa8 21 Kd2 Rb8 22 Ra1 Rxd5+ 23 Ke3 Re5+ 24 Kd2 and a draw was agreed because a repetition of moves is just around the corner, S.Karjakin-A.Shirov, Bilbao 2009.

b) 18 Qe3 Qc7 19 Re2 Rb8 20 Rd4 Rc8 21 Rdd2 Re8 22 Qd4 Qa7 23 g4 Rc7 and it is completely even, L.Aroshidze-K.Oliva, Barbera del Valles 2014.

18 ... b4

In an attempt to mix things and possibly gain a tempo on the queenside attack, Black has also tried 18 ... Qa8 19 Rxe7 Bf5 20 g4 a4 21 Bxa4 Qxa4 22 gxf5 Rfc8 23 c3 b4 (a one-pawn battering ram) 24 axb4 (24 fxg6 Rxc3+ 25 bxc3 Rxc3+ 26 Qxc3 bxc3 27 gxh7+ Kh8 should lead to a draw) 24 ... Qa1+ 25 Kc2 Qa4+ 26 Kc1 Qa1+ 27 Kc2 Qa4+ 28 Kb1 (avoiding the immediate draw) 28 ... Rxc3! 29 Ra7 was P.Leko-N.Grandelius, Malmo 2012, and now the simplest continuation was 29 ... Qxa7 30 bxc3 Ra8 31 Rc1 Qa1+ 32 Kc2 Qa2+ 33 Kd1 Qb3+ 34 Rc2 Qc4 and Black's activity plus White's uncertain king situation easily compensate for the two missing pawns.

19 axb4 axb4 20 Qxb4 Qa8 21 Kd2

In A.Seyb-M.Fedorovsky, Wunsiedel 2012, White achieved nothing after 21 Qd4 Rb8 22 Rxe7 Rxb3 23 Rxd7 Qa1+ 24 Kd2 Qa5+ 25 Kc1 Qa1+ with a draw by repetition.

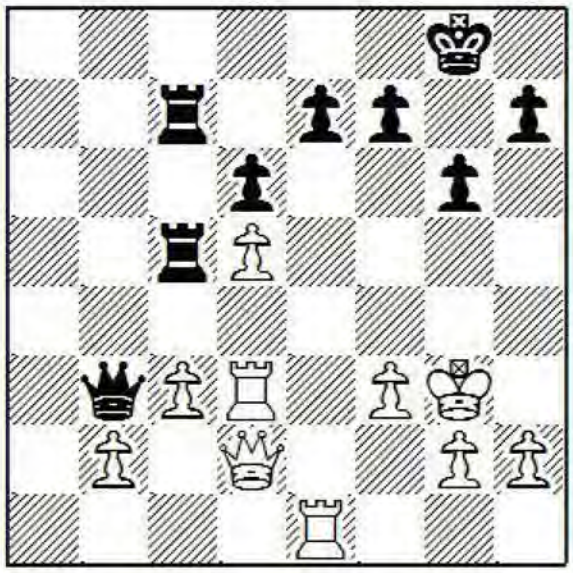
21 ... Rb8 22 Qd4 Qa5+

An interesting and sharp alternative is 22 ... e5, attempting to take advantage of the fact that White's king is currently goofing around in the centre. After 23 dxe6 Bxe6 24 Rxe6 Rxb3 25 Ra1 Qc8 26 Rxd6 Rb8, White has two extra pawns, but the king situation provides Black with ample compensation. One line runs 27 Kd1 Rc4 (Black cannot take on c2 as after 27 ... Rxc2 28 Rd8+ Qxd8 29 Qxd8+ Rxd8+ 30 Kxc2 and Black has an unpleasant defence ahead) 28 Qd5 Rc5 29 Qd2 Qc7 30 Rd7 Qb6 and Black has pretty good compensation, but no more than that.

23 Ke2 Rb4 24 Qd2 Qb6 25 Ra1 Rc8 26 Kf1 Bb5+ 27 Kf2 Bc4 28 Bxc4 Rbxc4

Black could play moderately more accurately at this juncture with 28 ... Rcxc4 and after 29 b3 Rc8 30 Ke2 Rd4 31 Rd3 Rxd3 32 Qxd3 Qc5 33 c4 e6 34 Qe3 Qxe3+ 35 Kxe3 exd5 36 cxd5 Rc3+ 37 Kd4 Rxb3, the game should end in a draw.

29 c3 R4c5 30 Rae1 R8c7 31 Kg3 Qb7 32 Rd3 Qb3



Question: I can see that White's king is a bit out in the open, but I do not think that Black can attack it particularly easily, if at all. So what kind of compensation does Black have?

Answer: You're right about the king not being a major concern for White right away, but it will need to be addressed for sure. That aside, Black has positional pressure against White's queenside pawns. This may not secure a win, but as in the Benko Gambit (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5), Black here massages White's position and manoeuvres the heavy pieces around to provide the maximum amount of irritation, and then possibly the apples will start dropping off the tree.

I will presume that the players were in some level of time trouble, because the remainder of the moves bears resemblance of haste: many inaccuracies and some outright mistakes.

33 h3

White is eager to find a place to hide his king, but for now it is pretty safe on g3. A good alternative is 33 Rd4 Rb7 34 Re2 and White has stabilised against Black's pressure on the queenside.

33 ... Kg7

There is no immediate need for this. Black should keep the pressure on with 33 ... Rb7 34 Re2 Rcb5 35 Rd4 Qxb2 36 Qe1 Qb1 37 Rxe7 Qf5 38 Rxb7 Rxb7. While White has an extra pawn, it will definitely be difficult to convert.

34 Kh2

White carries on with his plan to get the king to safety, but 34 Re4 would be a better option and after 34 ... Rc4 35 Rxc4 Rxc4 36 Re3 Rc7 37 Qd4+ Kg8 38 Re2, White can start thinking cracking open the black king's cover.

34 ... Rb5

Here 34 ... Rb7!? looks more promising. For instance, after 35 Re2 Rcb5 36 Qg5 Qc4 37 Rdd2 e5!, Black will either win the d5-pawn or put a clamp on the entire White queenside, ensuring equality.

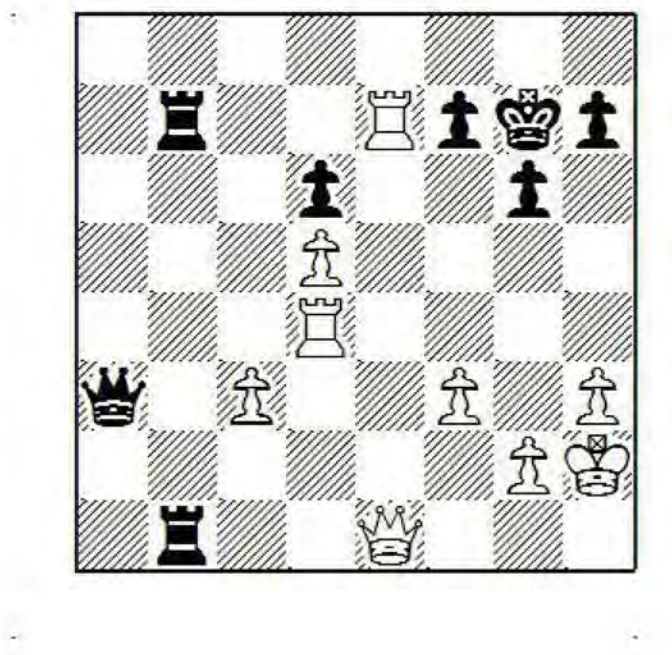
35 Re2

White was not ready for the committal pawn sacrifice 35 c4 as after 35 ... Qxc4 36 Rc3 Qb4 37 Re4 Qa5 38 b4 Qa7 39 Rc6 f6 40 Qd3 Rcb7 41 Rxe7+ Rxe7 42 Qxb5 Re1, Black has some measure of counterplay against the white king.

35 ... Rcb7 36 Rd4 Qxb2 37 Qe1 Qa3?

The way to go is 37 ... Qb1! and after 38 Rxe7 Qxe1 39 Rxe1 Rb2, Black should be able to hold the draw without too many problems by doubling the rooks on White's 2nd rank.

38 Rxe7 Rb1



Exercise: What is White's best move?

39 Qe6?

Answer: White misses his chance. With 39 Rxf7+! Rxf7 (39 ... Kxf7? 40 Rf4+ Kg7 41 Qe8 is curtains for Black) 40 Qxb1 Qxc3 41 Re4 Qf6 42 Qe1 h5, White has some winning chances.

The text move however, leads to a drawn ending.

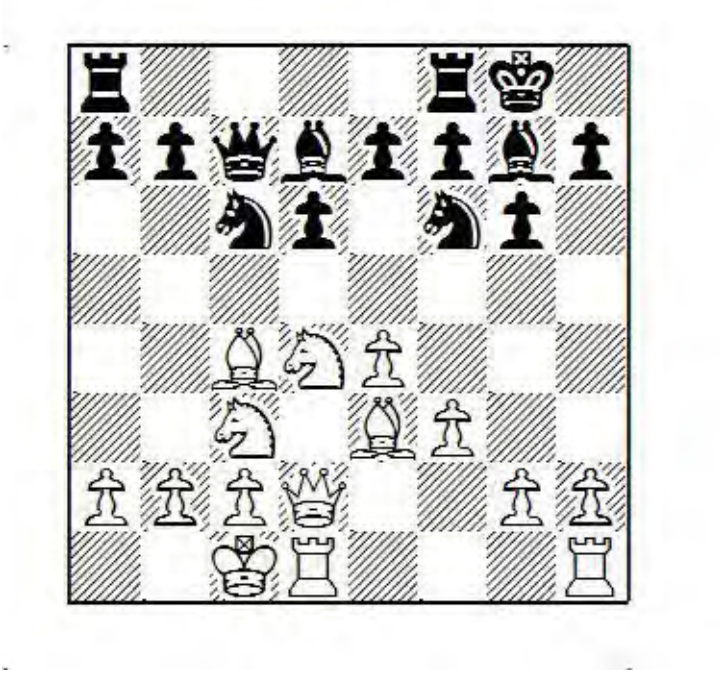
39 ... Rxe7 40 Qxe7 Qxc3 41 Rf4 ½-½

Chapter Thirteen
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: 10…Qc7, 10…Qb8 and 10…Qa5

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0

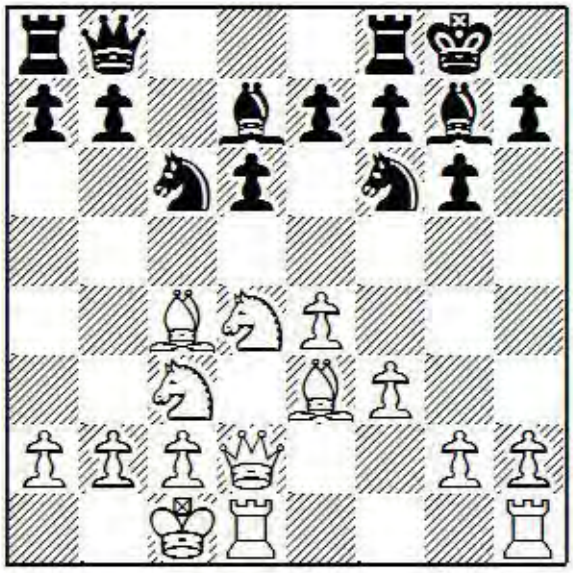
The variations in this chapter have very little in common with each other, aside from the fact that they look like they should and all involve Black making a queen move to the queenside! It would also be fair to say that theoretically, all three of them are under a bit of a cloud, but that should not stop you from analysing and trying them. It did not stop me!

10 ... Qc7



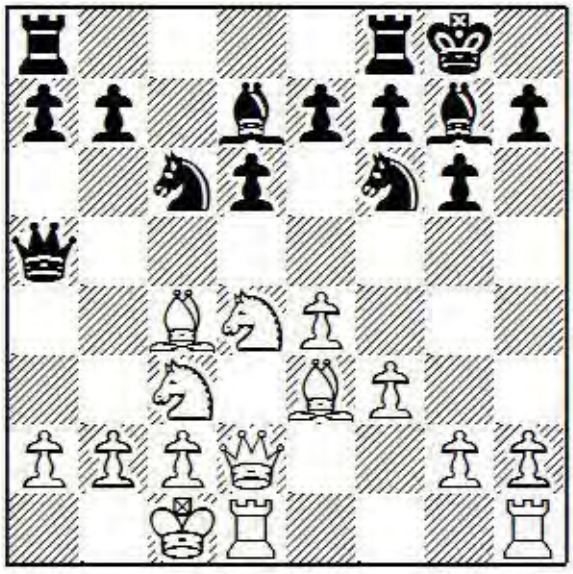
Of the lines covered in this chapter, this move is the clumsiest-looking, but also the one I have played the most. It has its own set of rules and ideas compared to more 'normal' lines in the Dragon, including attacking with the queen in the first row. But like having the king lead the charge in medieval war, having the queen lead the attack leaves you vulnerable in other ways. It may still be playable, but I remain somewhat sceptical. Game 64 explores this variation.

10 ... Qb8



Now this really looks odd, but of course the idea is obvious: throw the b- and a-pawns in White's face and with heavy pieces on all the open files, they should be optimally placed, right? Well, not really and getting the attack coordinated is not as easy as one would think and in particular, the queen is not very well-placed on b8. Game 65 takes a thorough look at this variation.

10 ... Qa5

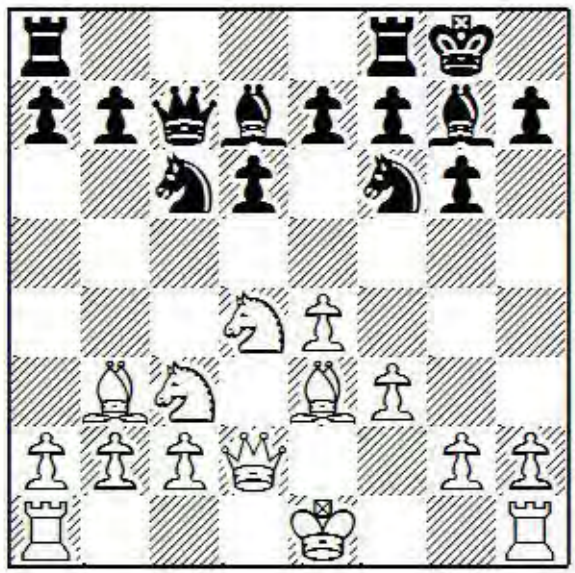


This is by far the most popular move of the three and therefore I have saved it for last in this chapter. While never being very popular, it has been played consistently and with decent results. The English Grandmaster and supreme Dragoneer Chris Ward has been promoting the variation in a couple of books as well as regularly on the *Chesspublishing.com* website. The play will resemble other lines of the Dragon, but they have their own flair and their own tactical ideas that one has to get acquainted with in order to navigate these lines with confidence.

Unlike the other two queen moves, there is a lot of established theory to this line and therefore it takes a few games to cover the most important variation. In Game 66, White plays 12 h4 and 13 g4, which is one of the critical ideas against Black's set-up. Game 67 covers 12 Kb1 Ne5 13 h4 b5, which leads to some critical positions that both sides have to know well to navigate accurately. If these lines are not to Black's liking, then 13 ... Nc4 is an alternative way to go as seen in Game 68. Finally in Game 69, we see a 'real' Dragon unfold when 12 h4 Ne5 13 h5 Rxc3 hits the board.

Game 64
O.Korneev-R.Hernandez Onna
Mondariz 2000

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2 Qc7



This is a variation that I had a love affair with for some years. It has the advantage of being largely unknown, in fact more so than the other lines that we are covering in this chapter. However, it also has a distinct problem, that it is not a very good move. In the note to White's 15th move, we will look at White's option that made me quit playing the line as Black.

Question: So what is Black's idea in this line?

Answer: The idea Black is angling for is to play ... Nc6-a5/e5 and then on to the c4-square. With the queen on c4, Black wants to put his rooks on c8 and b8 and toss the b-pawn forward. In addition, having the queen on c4 allows it in some line to retreat to f7, helping with the defence.

11 0-0-0 Rfc8

Question: So when should Black play ... Rfc8 or ... Ne5 or ... Na5? There seems to be different rules for different lines.

Answer: You should definitely not mix the variations, because each variation has its own rules, but in some cases having a knight on e5 is essential, in other cases it is interchangeable with ... Na5 and sometimes the latter move provides Black with extra options.

Here the text move and 11 ... Na5 typically transpose into the same lines, but occasionally Black wants to leave his rook on f8 for defensive purposes. For this reason I give preference to the knight move. While we are at it, I think ... Na5 is better than ... Ne5, because Black has the additional option of exchanging on b3 if the need should arise, even if it rarely does. Now after 12 h4, let us examine the following:

a) 12 ... Nc4 13 Bxc4 Qxc4 14 h5 b5 15 hxg6 fxg6 16 Bh6 b4 17 Nd5 Qxa2 18 Nxe7+ Kf7 19 Nb3 Nxe4 20 Qf4+ Bf6 21 fxe4 Qxb2+ 22 Kd2 and although Black ended up winning the game, here he took a head dive in shallow water with 22 ... Qc3+ in P.Simek-L.Klima, Havlickuv Brod 2005, but he could have kept things lively and messy with 22 ... Kxe7 23 Bxf8+ Rxf8 24 Rxh7+ Ke8 25 Qg3 Be5 26 Qxg6+ Kd8 27 Qg5+ Kc8, keeping even chances.

b) My computer likes the exchange on b3 a lot and claims that after 12 ... Nxb3+ 13 axb3 h5 14 Bg5 Qd8, White is only fractionally better but this is hardly in the spirit of the variation.

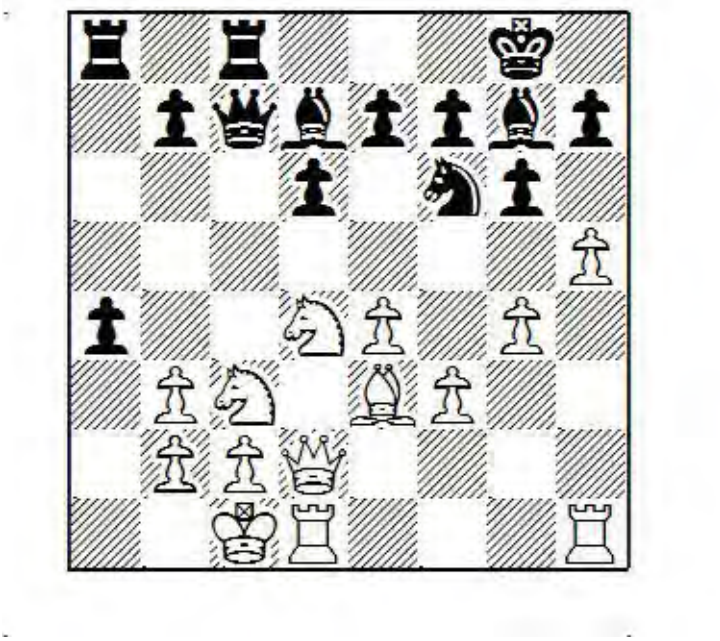
c) It makes sense to play 12 ... Rfc8 13 Kb1 Nxb3 14 axb3 a5 followed by ... a5-a4 with a very interesting game.

12 Kb1

Occasionally White plays 12 g4, which is not particularly critical for Black, for instance 12 ... Na5 13

h4 (13 g5 is possibly the idea behind the previous move, kicking the f6-knight away from covering the d5-square, but it should not worry Black as after 13 ... Nh5 14 Nd5 Nxb3+ 15 axb3 Qd8 16 Ne2 e6 17 Ndf4?! Nxf4 18 Bxf4 Qb6 19 Kb1 d5 20 exd5 exd5 21 Ng3 a5 22 Be3 Qc6 and things are getting critical for White on the queenside, while nothing is going for White on the kingside. A.Planinec-D.Rajkovic, Belgrade 1978) may lead to the following choices:

a) 13 ... Nxb3+ 14 axb3 a5 15 h5 a4 is an interesting alternative.



Once again, Black finds a use for the extra option provided by placing the knight on a5 instead of e5 and chances are even.

b) 13 ... Nxc4 14 Bxc4 Qxc4 15 h5 b5 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 Qh2 Qf7 18 Kb1 Rc4 19 Nd5 Bh8 20 Rd2 was played in A.Filippov-T.Lammens, Enschede 2008, and now Black could get decent play with 20 ... Nxd5 21 exd5 Be5, but truth be told, I do not fancy Black's chances too much.

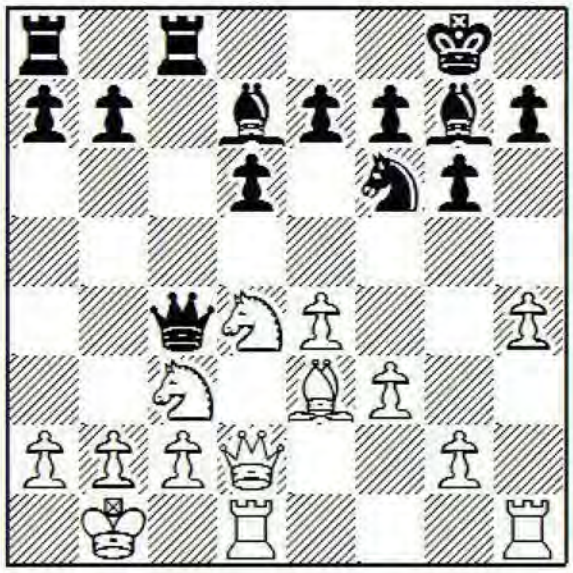
12 ... Ne5

Of course, 12 ... Na5 is naturally an option once again instead of the text move.

13 h4

Another option is to play 13 Bg5, threatening Bxf6 followed by Nd5. Following 13 ... Qd8 14 Rhe1 b5 15 f4 b4 (Black can also consider 15 ... Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 e5 b4 which will send us down an interesting rabbit hole after 18 Ncb5 dxe5 19 fxe5 Nd5 20 e6 Be8 21 exf7+ Bxf7 22 Ne6 Bxe6 23 Rxe6 Rc5 24 Bxe7 Nc3+ 25 bxc3 Qxd2 26 Rxd2 bxc3 27 Bxc5 cxd2 28 Rd6 Bf8 29 Rxd2 Bxc5 and White has an extra pawn, though this is by no means a guaranteed win) 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 fxe5 dxe5 18 exd5 exd4 19 d6 Bf5 20 Bxe7 Qd7 21 Qf4 a5 22 g4 Bxg4 was played in S.Alonso-S.Kudrin, Buenos Aires 2005, and now White should have played 23 Bxf7+ Kh8 24 Bf6 Qxf7 25 Bxg7+ Qxg7 26 Qxg4, heading towards a win in the heavy-piece ending.

13 ... Nc4 14 Bxc4 Qxc4



15 h5!?

Question: I remember hearing Bobby Fischer saying something like "sac, sac and mate" as the recipe to beat the Dragon. Is there ever a time when White should not play h4-h5 and sacrifice a pawn?

Answer: It is worth remembering that when Fischer wrote those words, in the notes to a game he played against my compatriot Bent Larsen in 1958, the world of Dragon theory and understanding was entirely different. While it occasionally was made to look simple, it rarely is. It is true that White often sacrifices his h-pawn with h4-h5, but that is by no means the same as an automatic win or even a draw, for that matter! In this case, the text move is not a bad move.

Let's look at the alternatives:

a) I think White can do substantially better with 15 Bh6!?, which is what I faced in my last game in this variation: 15 ... b5 (15 ... Bh8 is possibly better, but not by much as after 16 Bg5 Re8 17 g4 b5 18 h5 Rac8 1 Qh2, Black is looking at a very ugly threat down the h-file which may well be the end of him) 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 h5 Be6 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 Nxe6+ Qxe6 20 Nxb5 (20 Nd5!? Qf7 21 Qh6+ Kg8 22 Nxf6+ exf6 23 Rxd6 leaves White a clear pawn up) 20 ... Rab8 21 Nd4 Qf7 22 g4 a5 23 Ne2 (White can improve with the simple 23 Rh6!? Kg8 24 g5 Nh5 25 Qxa5 e5 26 Nb3 getting an obviously better position, likewise 23 g5!? Nd7 24 Qxa5 is easily better for White) 23 ... a4 24 g5 Nd7 25 Rh3 Ne5 and this position was evaluated by Gufeld & Stetsko as favourable for Black, but things are more like equal at this point. However, White crashed pretty badly after 26 Qd5 (26 Rdh1 looks good, but 26 ... h5 27 gxh6+ Kh7 28 Qd4 Qc4 is perfectly acceptable for Black.) 26 ... Qxd5 27 exd5 Nc4 28 Nd4 Nxb2!? (at this point, I knew things were turning my way and my opponent looked pretty disgusted but 28 ... Rxb2+ 29 Ka1 Rb4 is possibly the better option) 29 Ne6+?? (now White loses swiftly when instead 29 Rdh1 h5 30 gxh6+ Kh7 31 Ka1 was undeniably better) 29 ... Kg8 30 Rdh1 Nd3+ 31 Ka1 Nf2 and White resigned in S.Maus-Ca.Hansen, Gausdal 1990.

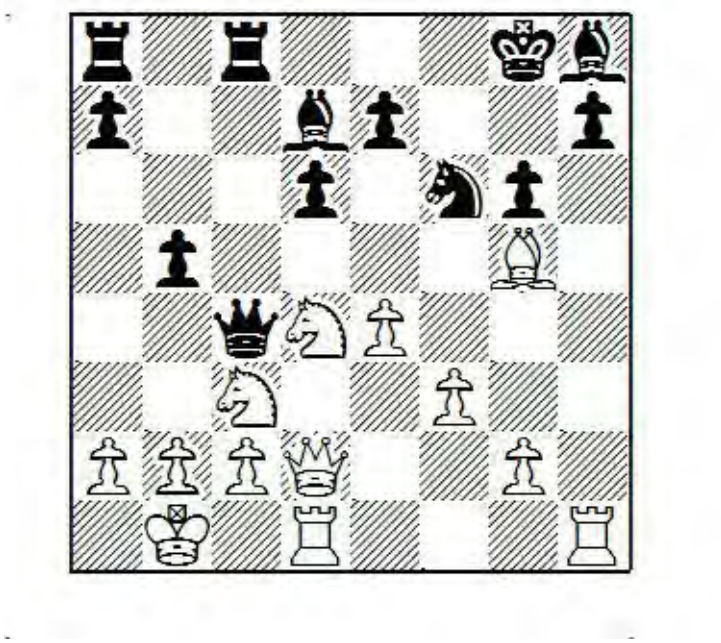
b) Another option, but clearly harmless is 15 g4 b5 16 h5 e5 17 Nde2 b4 18 Nd5 Nxd5 19 exd5 e4?! (19 ... a5!? 20 Ng3 a4 and Black is doing very nicely) 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 fxe4?? (21 Nd4! Be5 22 Qf2 Rc7 23 f4 Bxg4 24 fxe5 and White is taking control of the game) 21 ... Bxg4 22 Rh2?! Qxe4 23 Rdh1?! Bf3 24 Rd1?! Qe5 and the dual threat to mate and pick up the h2-rook ended White's resistance in R.Lavretzkij-ASyrchikov, Perm 2009.

15 ... b5 16 hxg6?!

White should not necessarily rush to make this exchange as it allows Black to use the f7- square as a retreat square for the queen.

A stronger alternative is 16 Bh6!? Bh8 17 Nf5! Bxf5 18 exf5 which leads to an interesting battle. For instance 18 ... b4 19 Ne2 Rc5 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 fxg6 hxg6 22 Bg5 Kf7 23 Rh4 Qd5 24 Bxf6 Bxf6 25 Rxb4 Qxd2 26 Rxd2 Rh8 27 a4 and White has an extra pawn. However, the bishop is stronger than the knight and with two active rooks, thus giving Black decent counterplay towards saving the draw.

16 ... fxg6 17 Bh6 Bh8 18 Bg5



Question: What is the point of playing Bh6 and then Bg5?

Answer: Since White does not lose any time doing this (because Black uses a tempo to retreat the bishop to h8), it actually helps White in some variations, because the bishop is better placed on g7, especially when defending against an attack on the h-file.

18 ... Qf7

Black is jumping the gun on going on the defensive. Instead he should have played actively with 18 ... b4! 19 Nce2 Rc5 20 Nc1 a5 and Black is doing rather well after 21 b3 Qf7 22 Nd3 Rc7 23 Be3 Rac8 and I rather like Black's chances.

19 Bxf6 Bxf6 20 Nd5 Bxd4 21 Qxd4 Be6 22 b3

White does not achieve anything with 22 Qd2 Rc5 23 c3 Rac8 24 Qg5 Bxd5 25 exd5 a5 and chances are about equal.

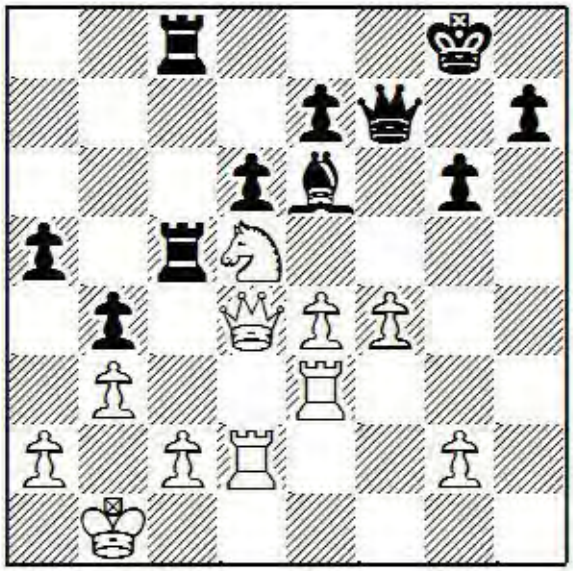
22 ... Rc5 23 Rd2 Rac8

Opening the a-file with 23 ... a5 24 f4 a4 looks promising.

24 Re1 a5 25 Re3 b4

Black could again consider pushing on a-file with 25 ... a4 26 f4 a3.

26 f4



26 ... Bxd5?!

Things are complicated. An interesting option for Black at this juncture is 26 ... Qg7!, inviting an endgame with 27 Qxg7+ Kxg7 28 f5 (28 Nxe7?! is met by 28 ... Re8 29 f5 Rxe7 30 fxe6 Rxe6 and Black is certainly not worse) 28 ... gxf5 29 Nxe7 f4 30 Red3 Re8 31 Nf5+ Bxf5 32 exf5 Rxf5 33 Rxd6 h5 and the likely result is a draw.

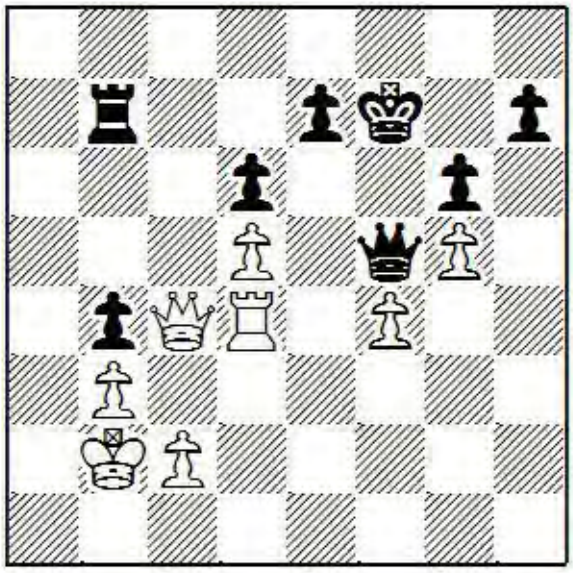
27 exd5 Rc3 28 Rxc3 Rxc3 29 a3 Rc5?!

It could appear as if both sides are affected by time trouble throughout the remainder of this game. Now the momentum starts shifting to White. Black has to remain active with 29 ... Rg3!? 30 axb4 axb4 31 Qxb4 Rg4 32 Qc3 Rxf4 with a fascinating heavy piece ending on our hands.

30 axb4 axb4 31 g4 Rb5 32 g5 Qf5 33 Qc4 Rb7 34 Rd4

Keeping the rook flexible with 34 Kb2 is possibly better.

34 ... Kf7 35 Kb2



35 ... Rb8?!

Once again Black retreats. It looks like 35 ... Qh3 36 Rd3 Qf1 37 Qd4 Rc7 would offer better chances.

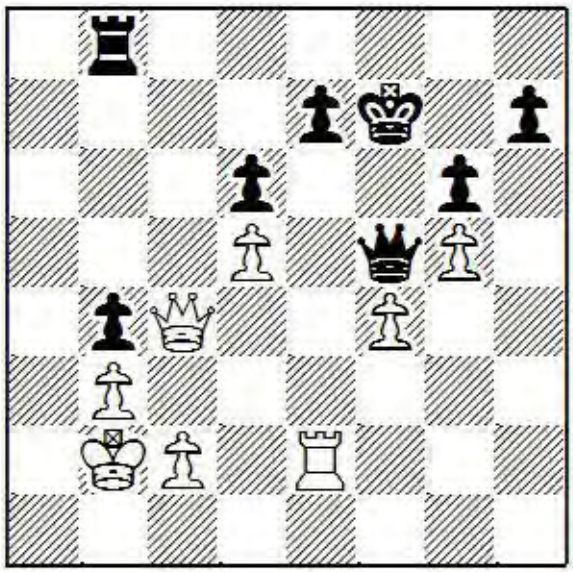
36 Rd2

Or 36 Qe2 Kf8 37 Qe1 Rb5 38 Rxb4 Rxb4 39 Qxb4 Qxd5 40 Qc3 with a difficult queen ending ahead.

36 ... Rb7

Again, Black should be aiming for activity with 36 ... Qh3 37 Re2 Rb7.

37 Re2?! Rb8??



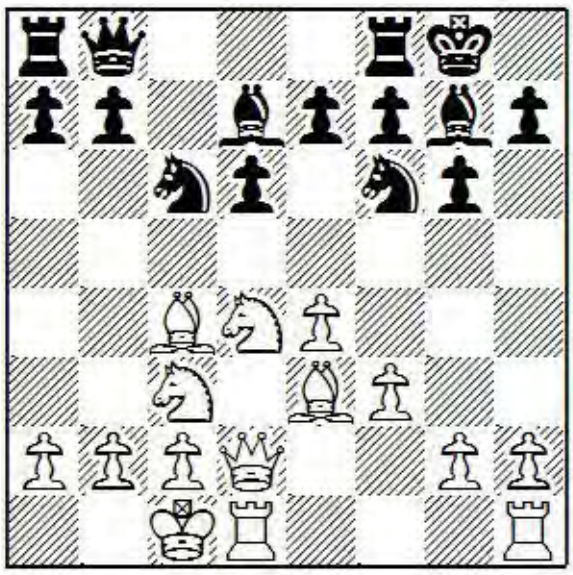
A complete collapse. Now White wins a pawn and exposes the black king with a snap combination.

Black stays in the game with 37 ... Qh3! 38 Qd4 h5 39 Re1 h4 40 Qh8 Rc7 41 Qh7+ Kf8 and White should take the draw by perpetual check.

38 Rxe7+! 1-0

Game 65
Y.Nikolov-P.Tkaczyk
Correspondence 2001

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 0-0-0 Bd7 10 Bc4 Qb8



This move looks, to put it mildly, rather odd. Why does Black want to place his queen on this square when there are so many other, more active choices available? Well, for starters it is not seen that often and white players are likely not that familiar with the ins and outs of this line, giving Black a decent

chance to whip up a position that has not been studied to death by his counterpart at home. Black intends to throw ... b7-b5 at White and then start working the open files towards White's king.

The line does not have a good reputation and I think that this is largely deserved. In the early 1990s, I conducted a thorough analysis of this line for Black and even played on some occasions, both in normal games and, like our main game, in correspondence chess. The results were mixed, but nearly every time, the positions I ended up with out of the opening were dubious, so I quickly quit this line again. However, several strong players have utilised this line, some even several times, such as Belorussian Grandmaster Alexey Fedorov who wheeled out against very strong opponents. Will this line ever become a popular choice for Black? I seriously doubt it, because it is considerably less flexible than Chinese Dragon which shares some of the same ideas.

11 h4!?

a) 11 Nd5 has been used against Fedorov a couple of times with good results. The main line is 11 ... Nxd5 (instead, 11 ... Re8 12 h4 Ne5 13 Nxf6+ Bxf6 14 Be2 b5 15 h5 Nc4 16 Bxc4 bxc4 17 g4 d5 18 exd5 Qe5 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 Bf4 Qxd5 21 Qh2 h5 22 gxh5 g5 23 Rhg1 was sharp, but quite uncomfortable for Black, A.Goloshchapov-A.Fedorov, Dubai 2002) 12 Bxd5 Rc8 13 h4 e6 (13 ... h5 14 g4 is too dangerous for Black) 14 Bxc6 bxc6 15 Nb3 d5 16 c3 (White is aiming for a positional clamp on Black's position) 16 ... Qb5?! (or 16 ... a5 17 h5 a4 18 Nc5 Be8 19 f4 with a clear advantage for White) 17 h5 Rab8? 18 hxg6 fxg6, P.Leko-A.Fedorov, Batumi 1999. Now, 19 g4! is very strong as after 19 ... e5 20 Qh2 Kf7 21 Nc5, Black is in bad shape.

b) After 11 Kb1, Black can choose:

b1) 11 ... b5 12 Be2 (White can capture on b5 in with the bishop or either knight number, but prising open the b-file is exactly what Black is angling for and the retreat to b3 is more natural, but apparently Ehlvest was more comfortable retreating the bishop to e2 in case Black throws his a-pawn forward as well) 12 ... b4 (both 12 ... a6!? and particularly 12 ... Rc8!? should be considered at this juncture) 13 Nd5 Qb7 (instead 13 ... Nxd5 14 exd5 Nxd4 15 Bxd4 Bxd4 16 Qxd4 a5 17 h4 Qa7 18 Qd2 is playable for Black though a tad uncomfortable) 14 Nxf6+ (Ward points out that 14 Nxc6 Bxc6 15 Nxb4 runs into 15 ... a5!? after which 16 Nxc6?? loses on the spot to 16 ... Nxe4!) 14 ... Bxf6 15 h4 Rfc8 16 h5 Nxd4 17 Bxd4 e5 18 Bf2 Be6 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 Bh4 Bxh4 21 Rxh4 and White has a positional advantage, J.Ehlvest-A.Fedorov, Dubai 2001.

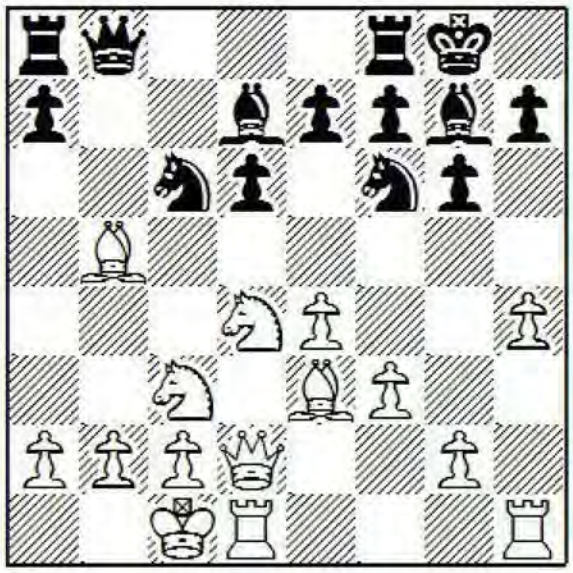
b2) Less to the point but also playable is 11 ... Ne5 12 Bb3 b5 13 Bh6 a5 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 Nd5 a4 16 Nxf6 axb3 17 Nxd7 bxa2+ 18 Ka1 Nxd7 19 h4 Nf6 20 g4 and now Black blundered with 20 ... e5?, allowing 21.Nf5+ in V.Jandovsky-I.Starostits, Pardubice 2000. Instead Black should have played 20 ... Rg8 21 h5 Kf8 22 hxg6 hxg6 23 Qh6+ Ke8 24 Qe3 and White has ample compensation for the pawn.

c) 11 Bb3 a5 12 a4 Nxd4 (12 ... Rc8 leaves White with control over the b5-square with a fun, short game continuing 13 Ndb5 Nb4 14 Kb1 d5 15 exd5 Bxb5 16 Bf4 Rxc3 17 Bxb8 Rxb3 18 Be5 Bd3 19 cxd3 Nfxd5 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 and even though there is obviously plenty left to play for, the players agreed to a draw in W.Browne-G.Sosonko, Wijk aan Zee 1975) 13 Bxd4 b5 14 Rhe1 e5 15 Be3 bxa4 16 Bxa4 Bxa4 17 Nxa4 Ra6 18 Bg5 Rc8 19 Re3 was G.Todorovic-D.Velimirovic, Zlatibor 2007 and now 19 ... h6 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 gives mutual chances.

11 ... b5

Question: White can capture this pawn with three different minor pieces, why can this move even be played?

Answer: Excellent question! For starters, if Black could not play this move, the line would be out of business right from the get-go. If White captures the pawn with 12 Bxb5, Black would get exactly what he aimed for.



Black can respond with 12 ... Nxd4 13 Bxd7 Nxf3 14 gxf3 Nxd7 and thus regains his pawn with a very nice position to boot. On 12 Ndxb5, Black can play 12 ... Ne5 followed by 13 Be2 Rc8 with decent compensation for the pawn. Finally on 12 Ncxb5, Black again plays 12 ... Ne5 13 Be2 Rc8 followed by ... Qb7 with some compensation for the pawn.

12 Bb3

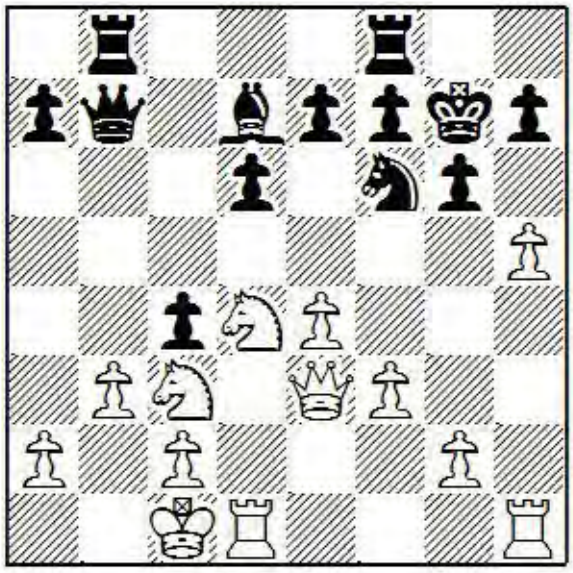
There are two other knight moves to consider:

a) White should not play the unambitious 12 Nd5 bxc4 (12 ... Nxe4!? 13 fxe4 bxc4 14 h5 Be5 15 Qf2 Qb7 is an interesting and untried alternative) 13 Nxc6 Nxd5 14 Nxb8 Bxb2+ 15 Kxb2 c3+ 16 Ka1 cxd2 17 Nxd7 Nxe3 18 Nxf8 Nxd1 19 Rxd1 Kxf8 20 Rxd2 Ke8 21 Rd3 Rc8 and after all these wholesale exchanges, a draw was agreed in S.Movsesian-A.Fedorov, Las Vegas 1999.

b) The knight trade 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 is not bad as after 13 Bd3 Rc8 14 h5 b4 15 Ne2 Be8 16 Kb1 a5 17 Bh6 Bh8 18 Bg5 a4 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 e5 dxe5 21 Bxf6 Bxf6 22 Qh6 Qc7 23 Qxh7+ Kf8 24 Bxg6 b3 25 cxb3 axb3 26 Rc1 bxa2+ 27 Ka1 Bxg6 28 Qxg6 Qb7 29 Rxc8+ Qxc8 30 Qe4, White has the better chances.

12 ... Na5 13 Bh6! Nxb3+

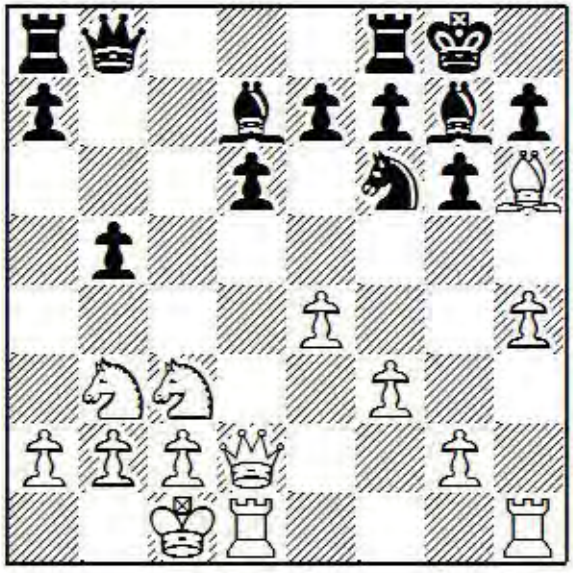
Black does not accomplish much with 13 ... Nc4 14 Bxc4 bxc4 15 h5 Qb7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qe3 Rab8 18 b3.



Even if Black has managed to open lines on the queenside, White is on top of things as the kingside attack will be difficult to contain.

14 Nxb3

More aggressive and better is 14 axb3! as after 14 ... b4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 exd5 h5 18 Rhe1, White is completely in control.



14 ... Bh8?

While thematic, throwing an exchange to the wind is not the best way to go. A better option is 14 ... Bxh6 15 Qxh6 b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 exd5 f6! 18 Rde1 (18 h5 g5 19 f4 g4 and while the position is better for White, Black is still very much in the game) 18 ... Rf7 19 Qd2 a5 20 Re4 Qb5 21 Rhe1 Re8 with a playable position for Black.

15 Bxf8 Qxf8 16 g4 a5 17 h5 b4

It looks tempting to push the pawns forward with 17 ... a4 18 Nd4 b4 but after 19 Nd5 or 19.Nce2, Black's attack does not seriously threaten White.

18 Nd5!? Nxd5 19 hxg6

White can also consider 19 exd5 a4 20 Nd4 b3 21 a3 bxc2 22 Kxc2 Rc8+ 23 Kb1 Rc5 24 Nc6 with

clearly better chances.

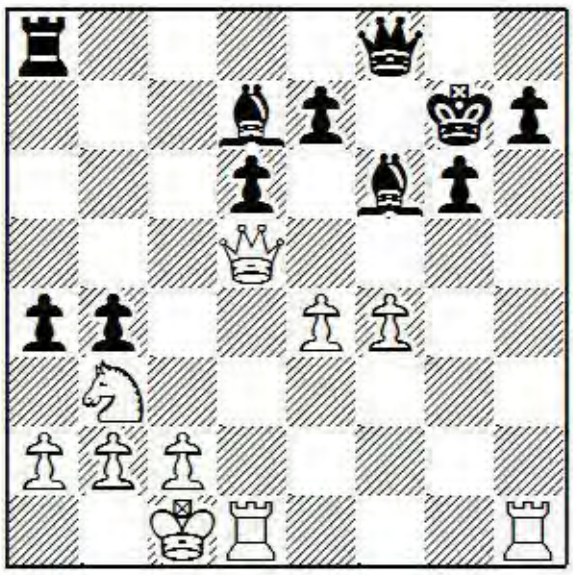
19 ... Nf6

If Black recaptures immediately with the pawn, White also has the better chances after say 19 ... hxg6 20 exd5 Qg7 21 Qd4 Qxd4 22 Nxd4 Bf6 and Black has a tough defence ahead of him.

20 g5

A similar-looking alternative is 20 e5 fxg6 21 exf6 Bxf6 22 Qd5+ Kg7 23 Nc5, also with clearly better chances for White.

20 ... fxg6 21 gxf6 Bxf6 22 Qd5+ Kg7 23 f4 a4



Exercise: Black's initiative is in full swing. What can White do to reduce its potency?

Answer: **24 Nc5!**

Kill off Black's bishop pair. Black's chances decrease tremendously after that. In fact, Black would like to reach an ending after 24 Nd2?! Qg8! when the bishop pair and extra pawn provide strong compensation.

24 ... dxc5 25 Qxd7

Alternatively White can try 25 e5 Bh4 26 Rxh4 Bf5 27 Rg1 Kh8 28 Rgh1 h5 29 Rxh5+ gxh5 30 Rxh5+ Bh7 31 Qe4 Qg8 32 Rxh7+ Qxh7 33 Qxa8+ Kg7 34 Qg2+ Kf8 35 b3 Qf5 36 Qf3 a3 with an interesting queen ending. White should be better, but Black's far advanced a-pawn may cause some worries for White.

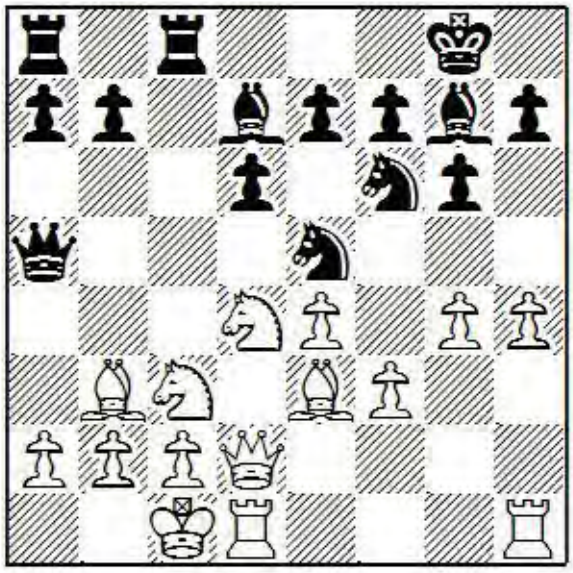
25 ... Bd4 26 Kb1 a3 0-1

Here the game (which is highly advantageous for White) ended with victory for Black, which is possibly due to a forfeit on time by White.

One possible continuation is 26 ... a3 27 f5 axb2 28 Qb7 Ra3 29 fxg6 hxg6 30 Rxd4 cxd4 31 Qxb4 Rf3 32 Qxd4+ Qf6 and although this may not be an easy win for White, it certainly is not yet lost for Black either.

Game 66
Cu.Hansen-P.Roder
Copenhagen 2006

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Ne5 10 Bb3 Bd7 11 0-0-0 Qa5 12 h4 Rfc8 13 g4



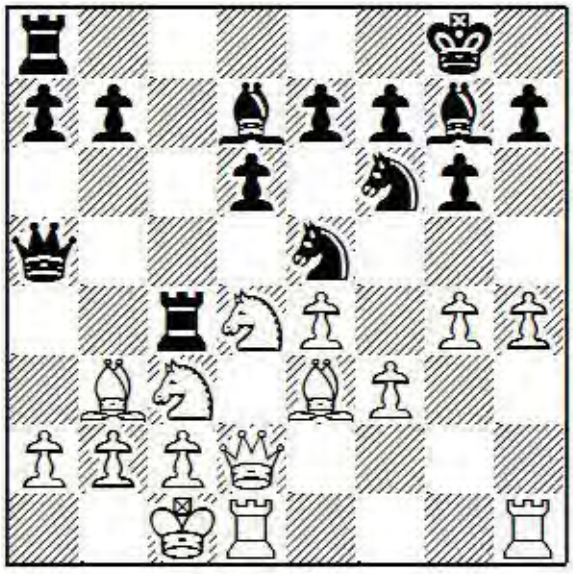
The immediate 13 h5 is analysed in the notes to Game 69.

13 ... b5

There are two other options:

a) The normal 13 ... Nc4 14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 Nb3 (15 h5!? Rxc3 16 Qxc3 Qxa2 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 Qb4 b5 19 Bh6 Bxh6+ 20 Rxh6 was seen in J.Klovans-C.Kreiling, Willingen 2001, and now 20 ... a5 21 Qa3 Qxa3 22 bxa3 was relatively best and quite playable for Black) 15 ... Qa6 16 e5 (16 g5?! is not any threat to Black 16 ... Nh5 17 Bd4 which was played in J.Furhoff-R.Djurhuus, Sweden 2004, and now 17 ... Bxd4 18 Nxd4 Rac8 would be quite comfortable for Black) 16 ... Nxg4! 17 fxg4 Bxg4 18 Rde1?! (Ftacnik gives 18 exd6 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Qa3+ 20 Kb1 Bxd1 21 d7! Bxc2+ 22 Qxc2 Rd8, and Black is obviously doing fine, but he has to be careful that White doesn't get something going on the kingside) 18 ... dxe5 19 Bh6 Bf6 20 Re3 Bf5 21 h5 b5 22 Rd1 Qc8 23 Qg2 a5 and Black has a good game, A.Beliavsky-D.Velimirovic, Szirak 1987.

b) The bold 13 ... Rc4!? is a lovely idea, but it looks somewhat artificial.



It should not work unless White (against common sense) decides to take the bait. White should ignore the exchange with 14 g5! (14 Bxc4 Nxc4 15 Qd3 Qb4 16 Nb3 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 Nxb2 18 Qd5 Nc4 19 Rd3

Bc6 and Black has ample compensation for the exchange, S.Solovjov-A.Motylev, St Petersburg 1999) 14 ... Nh5 15 f4 Rxd4 (Ward's suggestions of both 15 ... Rxc3 16 fxe5! Rc5 17 exd6 exd6 18 Qf2 and 15 ... Nf3 16 Nxf3 Rxc3 17 e5! do not look promising for Black) 16 Qxd4 (16 Bxd4?! Nf3 17 Qe3 Nxd4 18 Rxd4 Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Nxf4 and Black is fine, S.Sulskis-S.Porat, Ohrid 2009) 16 ... Ng4 17 Qd3 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Bb5 19 c4 Nxe3 20 Qxe3 Qa3+ was Y.Quesada Perez-A.Gonzalez Perez, Santa Clara 2009, and now after 21 Kb1 Bc6 22 Rhe1, Black has nothing but trouble.

14 h5

Grabbing the b-pawn gives Black a good game after 14 Ncxb5 Qxd2+ 15 Rxd2 Nxf3! 16 Nxf3 Bxb5, L.Shytaj-C.Aldorovandi, Porto San Giorgio 2002.

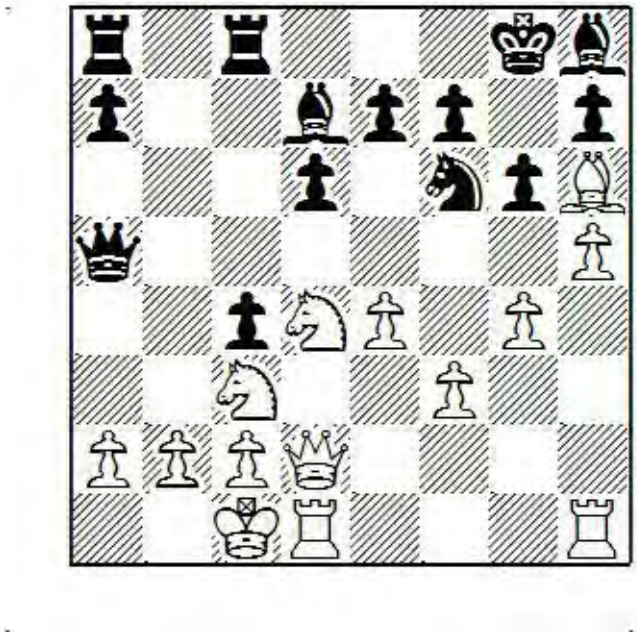
14 ... Nc4

This is probably the last chance Black has to escape the punishment that is being brought down upon him in what follows. A good choice is 14 ... b4!? 15 Nce2 Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 Kb1 Rac8 18 Rc1 Qc7 19 hxg6 fxg6 with chances to both sides, A.Nikolova-I.Gaponenko, Konya 2010.

15 Bxc4 bxc4 16 Bh6

Considering the strength of White's choices in the below, it seems superfluous to look at alternatives. But for illustrative and educational purposes, let's have a look at 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 Kb1 Rab8 18 Ka1 Qb4 19 Qc1, G.Milos-S.Kudrin, Buenos Aires 2003, and now 19 ... Qb7 20 Bh6 Bh8 gives mutual chances.

16 ... Bh8



Exercise: How does White accelerate his attack?

Answer: **17 Nf5!**

White ups the ante with this pseudo-knight sacrifice by threatening checkmate with 18 Ne7+ and of course 17 ... gxf5?? loses to 18 Qg5+.

17 ... Re8

Black has also tested 17 ... Bxf5 on a number of occasions, but it just seems to lead to trouble:

a) 18 gxf5?! Nxh5 19 Rxh5 (forces the draw, whereas Black just seems to be better after 19 Rdg1?! Bxc3!? 20 bxc3 Rab8! 21 Qd4 Nf6 22 Bg5 Qc5) 19 ... Bxc3 20 Qxc3 Qxc3 21 bxc3 gxh5 22 Rg1+ Kh8 23 Bg7+ with perpetual check, J.Lacasa Diaz-E.Van Haastert, Barcelona 2001.

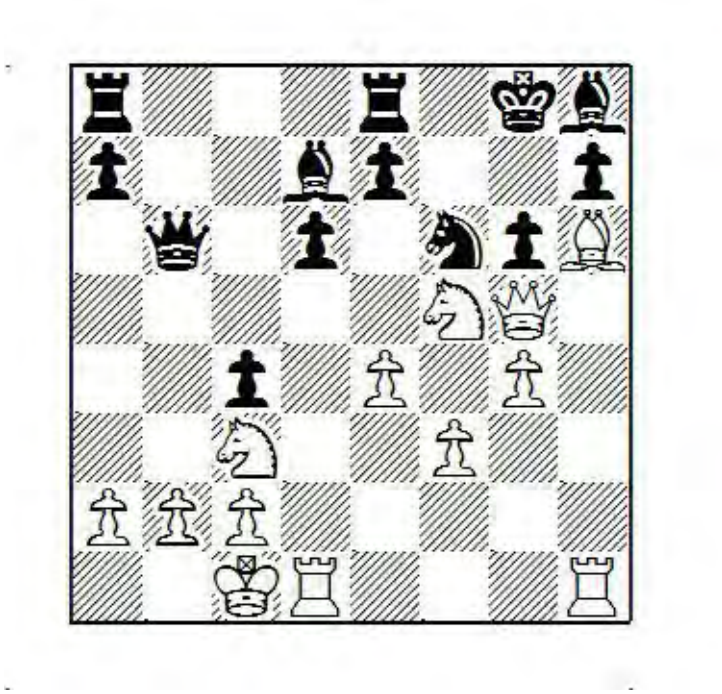
b) 18 exf5! is a killer of black hopes on my database as White has scored 100% in over-the-board play. Now 18 ... Rab8 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 Qe3! Qe5 21 Qxe5 dxe5 22 g5 (22 fxg6 hxg6 23 Be3 e4 24 fxe4

Nxg4 25 Bd4 Bxd4 26 Rxd4 and while the sides have an equal number of pawns, the black ones certainly are weaker than their white colleagues) 22 ... Ne8 23 Nd5 Rb7 24 fxg6 hxg6 25 Bf8 Kxf8 26 Rxh8+ Kf7 27 Ne3 and Black is trouble, Z.Ribli-H.Ree, Amsterdam 1973.

18 hxg6

Also, 18 Qg5 has proven a very potent weapon as well:

a) 18 ... Qb6 19 hxg6 fxg6



***Exercise* (tactical):** What is White's best move?

Answer: White has the perfect key to open the barn door towards Black's king with 20 Bg7!!.

After 20 ... Bxg7 21 Nxg7 Reb8 (also losing for Black is 21 ... Kxg7 22 Qh6+ Kf7 23 Nd5) 22 Nh5! and here Black, to no avail, has tried:

a1) 22 ... Qxb2+ 23 Kd2 (the king is nice and safe on this square) 23 ... Nxh5 24 gxh5 Qb6 (24 ... Be8 25 hxg6 Bxg6 26 Rxh7 crashes through Black's defences) 25 Ke2! and it is over for Black.

a2) 22 ... d5 23 Nxf6+ exf6 24 Qh6 and Black is lost, N.Lakos-M.Cebalo, Oberwart 2003.

a3) 22 ... Nxh5 23 gxh5 Be8 24 b3 and with that little pawn move, Black's attack is out of fuel, while the punishment on the kingside is about to resume, J.Nunn-C.Ward, England (4NCL) 1998.

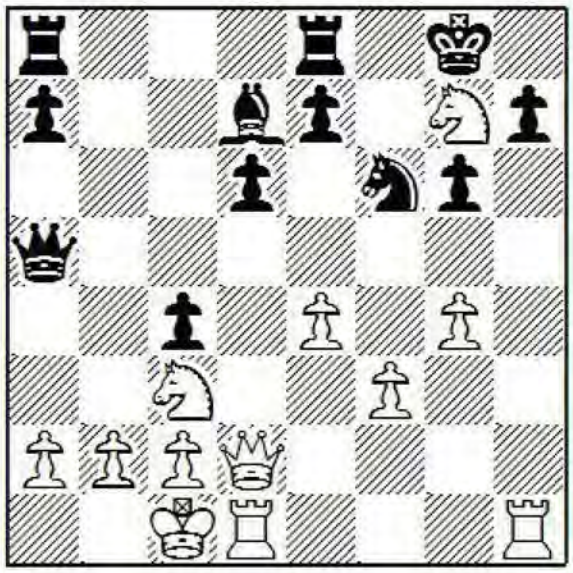
b) 18 ... Qe5 19 Qh4 Rab8 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 Be3 Bxf5 22 gxf5 Nh5 23 fxg6 hxg6 was played in J.Anderson-D.Tan, Scarborough 2001, and now White could have secured a decisive advantage with 24 f4 Qf6 25 Qg4.

c) Similarly, 18 ... Qb4 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 Bg7 Bxg7 21 Nxg7 Reb8 22 Nh5 is almost identical to our main line.

18 ... fxg6 19 Bg7!

As we also saw in the previous note, this is an elegant solution to get to Black's bishop that was otherwise so neatly tucked away in the corner.

19 ... Bxg7 20 Nxg7



20 ... Kxg7?!

More resilient is 20 ... Reb8!? 21 g5! Qb4 22 Qf4! (White could play 22.b3, but by including the queen in the kingside attack, it gains traction and the king can look after himself on d2) and now:

a) 22 ... e5!? has been suggested, but somehow the analyst missed the simple 23 Qh4 Qxb2+ 24 Kd2 and it's a one way street for White.

b) 22 ... Qxb2+ is definitely stronger and more obvious of course and after 23 Kd2 Qb6 24 Nf5 Bxf5 (after 24 ... Nxe4+ 25 fxe4 gxf5 26 exf5 Qc5 27 f6 Bf5 28 g6 Bxg6 29 Rdg1 Qe5 30 Qh4, White is also winning) 25 exf5 Nh5 26 Qe4 Kf8 27 Rhe1, we have a fully-fledged battle, but the black king looks considerably more vulnerable.

c) 22 ... Nh5? 23 Nxh5 gxh5 24 g6! hxg6 25 Rdg1 Be8 26 Rxh5! and Black resigned in M.Sagafos-D.Tan, Oropesa del Mar 1999.

21 Qh6+ Kf7

White also wins handily after 21 ... Kg8 22 g5 Qe5 (22 ... Nh5 is met by 23 Rxh5 gxh5 24 g6, and it is over) 23 gxf6 Qxf6 24 Qxh7+ Kf8 25 Rdg1 and Black resigned in D.Hersvik-B.Jensen, Helsinki 1999.

22 g5 Qe5

This is so ugly that it can only be an indication that things have already gone astray for Black. Other equally sad options:

a) 22 ... Rh8 23 gxf6 exf6 24 Rxd6 Be6 was A.Abreu Delgado-J.Yoos, Guines 1997, and now White can win in any number of ways, the most convincing of which is 25 Nd5 Qc5 26 Qf4 Bxd5 27 Qxf6+ Kg8 28 Rxd5 and Black is utterly busted.

b) 22 ... Nh5 did not work in a correspondence game as after 23 Rxh5 Rh8 24 Rh4 Rab8? (24 ... Qe5 25 f4 Qg7 26 Qxg7+ Kxg7 27 e5 is very good for White) 25 Rf4+ Kg8 26 Nd5 Qd8 27 Nf6+, Black resigned in H.Namyslo-J.Duart Fernandez, correspondence 1997.

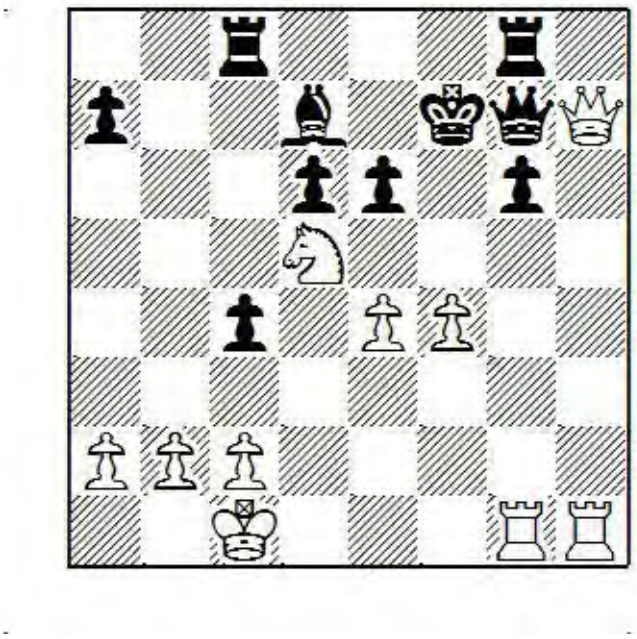
23 gxf6 Qxf6 24 Qxh7+ Qg7 25 Nd5

Black is pretty much already busted at this point.

25 ... Rac8 26 Rdg1 Rg8 27 f4?! e6?

Black still had the chance to get himself into a playable endgame with 27 ... Rh8. For example, after 28 Qxg7+ Kxg7 29 Rxh8 Rxh8 30 Nxe7 Kf7 31 Nxg6 Rg8 32 f5 Re8, there is still a lot of work to be done for White.

Let's go back to the position after 27 ... e6.



Exercise (tactical): What is White's best move?

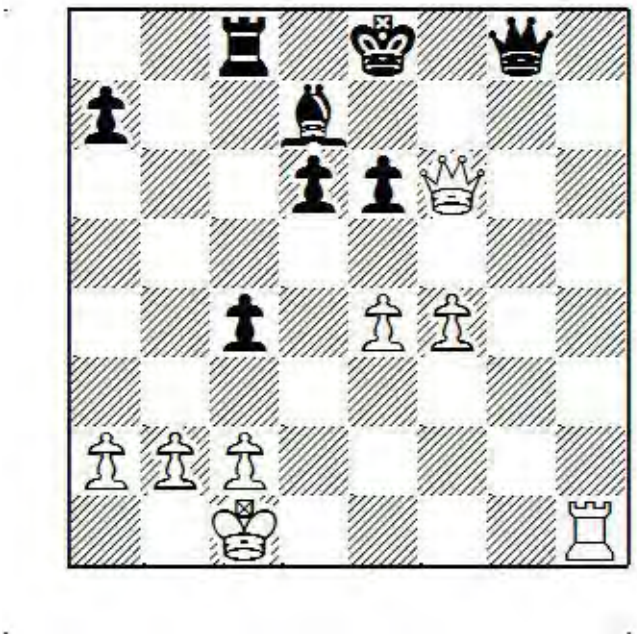
28 Ne7!

Answer: An audacious knight sacrifice (and fork). Black has no choice but to accept it and provide a refund shortly. Actually, White could also have played this on move 27 but I didn't want to spoil the exercise.

28 ... Kxe7 29 Rxg6 Qf7?

In relative terms, 29 ... Qxh7 would have been better, but of course after 30 Rxh7+ Kf8 31 Rxg8+ Kxg8 32 Rxd7, Black is unlikely to save the game.

30 Qh4+ Ke8 31 Rxg8+ Qxg8 32 Qf6

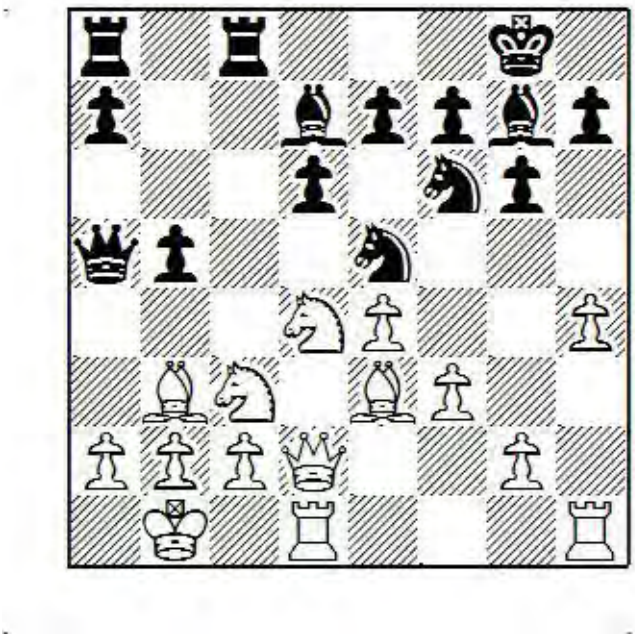


With White now poised to win the black queen, the game is practically over. Therefore the rest of the game will be left unannotated.

32 ... Rc5 33 Rh8 Qxh8 34 Qxh8+ Ke7 35 Qd4 Rc7 36 Qg7+ Ke8 37 f5 exf5 38 exf5 Kd8 39 Qf8+ Be8 40 Qxd6+ Kc8 41 Qf8 Kd8 42 Kd2 Rf7 43 Qc5 Rc7 44 Qb4 Kc8 45 Qf8 Kd8 46 Kc3 Kd7 47 Kd4 Kd8 48 c3 Kd7 49 Kd5 Kd8 50 f6 Rf7 51 Qh8 Rc7 52 Qg8 Rf7 53 Qg5 Rd7+ 54 Kxc4 1-0

Game 67
E.Dervishi-M.Cebalo

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 Bc4 0-0 8 f3 Nc6 9 Qd2 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Qa5 11 Bb3 Rfc8 12 Kb1 Ne5 13 h4 b5

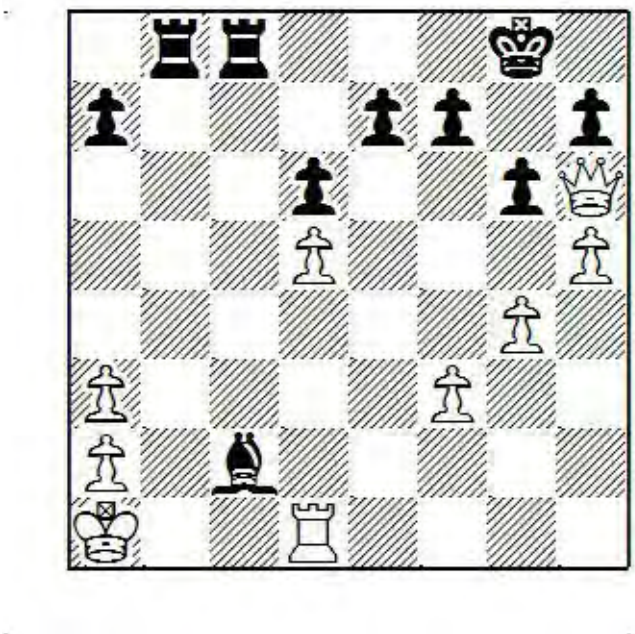


This pawn sacrifice, first essayed by Korchnoi in 1967, encourages White to enter a pawn-up ending at the price of some queenside pressure in the form of the half-open b- and c-files for Black.

14 Ncxb5

a) A major alternative is 14 Bh6, and now:

a1) 14 ... Nc4 enters a wormhole of a variation, which I'm struggling to make sense of, but let's try anyway. 15 Bxc4 Bxh6 (15 ... bxc4 was tried in R.Moor-M.Cebalo, Baden 2000 and is an attempt to avoid the wormhole, but White should be able to gain an advantage with 16 Nd5 Qxd2 17 Nxe7+ Kf8 18 Bxg7+ Kxg7 19 Rxd2) 16 Qxh6 bxc4 17 h5 Rab8 18 Nd5 Nxd5 19 exd5 Qa3 20 Nb3 cxb3 21 bxa3 bxc2+ 22 Ka1 cxd1Q+ 23 Rxd1 Bf5 24 g4 Bc2.

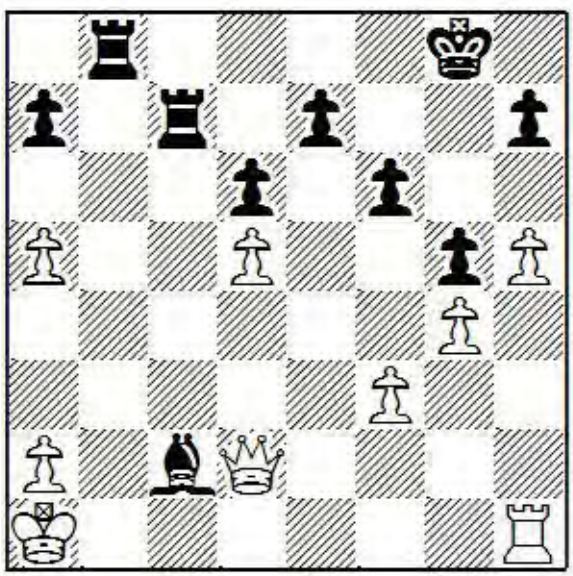


Question: Please settle down after the massive exchanges. Now, how should this be evaluated?

Answer: This position has been the subject of a lot of discussion. If we are counting beans, White is up, but counting against him is the ugly

situation of the king sealed in the corner at the a1-sqaure, and that fact alone more or less compensates for the situation with the beans.

Now there are some key options to look at: 25 Rc1 (25 hxg6?! is harmless as after 25 ... Bxg6! 26 f4 Be4 27 f5 Rc7 28 Qg5+ Kf8, Black is actually in charge and eventually went on to win the game, D.Janosevic-D.Velimirovic, Umag 1972) 25 ... Rc7 26 Qd2 and it looks like Black has gotten himself in to a bind, but this is where the issue of the king in the corner pops up as an issue with 26 ... Bd3! 27 Rh1 Bc2 28 Rc1 Bd3 29 Rh1 Bc2 30 a4 f6 31 Rc1 (31 hxg6 Bxg6 is entirely harmless) 31 ... Bd3 32 Rh1 Bc2 33 a5 g5.



With the threats against Black's king out of the way, you would think that Black can now start thinking about attacking White's soft pawns, but he still have his pawns, particularly those on e7 and a7, to worry about. 34 Rc1 Bd3 35 Rh1 Bc2 36 Rc1 and a draw was agreed as neither side can make headway, D.Gross-S.Ovsejevitsch, Budapest 1999.

a2) 14 ... Bxh6!? is the only way to avoid the long line that we will look at next. After 15 Qxh6 Rxc3 16 bxc3 Qxc3 17 Qc1?! (the stronger 17 Ne2! gains an important tempo for White to play 18 h5) 17 ... a5 18 a3 Rb8 19 Qb2 Qc7 20 c3 Nc4 21 Qc1 e5 22 Nc2 Be6, and Black is completely in charge, D.Sikder-I.Rausis, Vlissingen 1999.

b) White has also tried another traditional Dragon slayer move with 14 h5 Nxh5 15 g4 Nf6 16 Bh6 Bxh6 17 Qxh6 and now Black has to be careful, but thankfully he has his own weapons in 17 ... Rxc3! 18 g5 Nh5 19 Rxh5 gxh5 20 Rh1 Rxb3! 21 axb3 (21 Nxb3 leads to more forced sequence of moves that ultimately ends in a drawish endgame after 21 ... Qb6 22 Qxh5 Ng6 23 Qxh7+ Kf8 24 Qh6+ Ke8 25 Qh8+ Nf8 26 Qg7 Be6 27 Rh8 Qg1+ 28 Nc1 Kd7 29 Rxf8 Rxf8 30 Qxf8 Bxa2+ 31 Kxa2 Qxc1 32 Qxf7 Qxg5) 21 ... Ng6 22 Qxh5 was V.Tseshkovsky-S.Beshukov, Krasnodar 2000, and now Black should have played 22 ... e6 23 Qxh7+ Kf8 24 f4 Re8 25 Qh6+ (or 25 f5 exf5 26 exf5 Re1+ 27 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 28 Ka2 Qa5+ with a draw by repetition) 25 ... Ke7 26 Qg7 Kd8 27 Qxf7 Qd2 28 Nxb5 Qxf4 29 Qxg6 Bxb5 30 Rh7 Re7, and despite White's piece deficit, his g-pawn suffices to give him enough counterplay to gain the draw after 31 Rxe7 Kxe7 32 Qh7+ Ke8 33 g6 Bc6 34 Qxa7 Bxe4 35 g7 Qf1+ 36 Ka2 Bh7 37 Qb8+ Ke7 38 g8Q Bxg8 39 Qxg8 Qa6+ and we have a draw by perpetual check.

14 ... Qxd2 15 Bxd2!

15 Rxd2 is according to Chris Ward (who propagated the ... Qa5 Dragon in *Winning with the Sicilian Dragon 2*) the weaker choice. 15 ... Rab8 16 Nc3 a5 17 a4 (not 17 Nde2? a4 18 Nxa4 Bxa4 19 Bxa4 Nc4 and Black is already winning, P.Katzourakis-G.Nikolaou, Poros 1998) 17 ... Nc4 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 and now:

a) 19 Nde2?! Nxe4! 20 fxe4 (White is under severe pressure after 20 Nxe4 Rxb2+ 21 Kc1 Ra2 22 Kd1 Bxa4 and for that matter, 20 ...

Bxb2 is very possible too) 20 ... Bxc3 21 Nxc3 Rxc3 22 Bd4 Rcc8 (Ward suggested 22 ... Rc4!? and after 23 b3 (or 23 e5 d5 is also better for Black) 23 ... Rbb4 24 Rhd1 Bg4 25 Ka2 Bxd1 26 bxc4 Rxa4+ 27 Kb3 Rb4+ 28 Ka3 Bg4 29 c5 dxc5 30 Bc3 Rb8 31 Bxa5 and Black has an extra pawn and a bunch of weak pawns to target) 23 h5 Bxa4 24 hxg6 fxg6 25 e5 and while White is a pawn down, he has some counterplay and the opposite-coloured bishops to count on, E.Berg-K.Lie, Gausdal 2003.

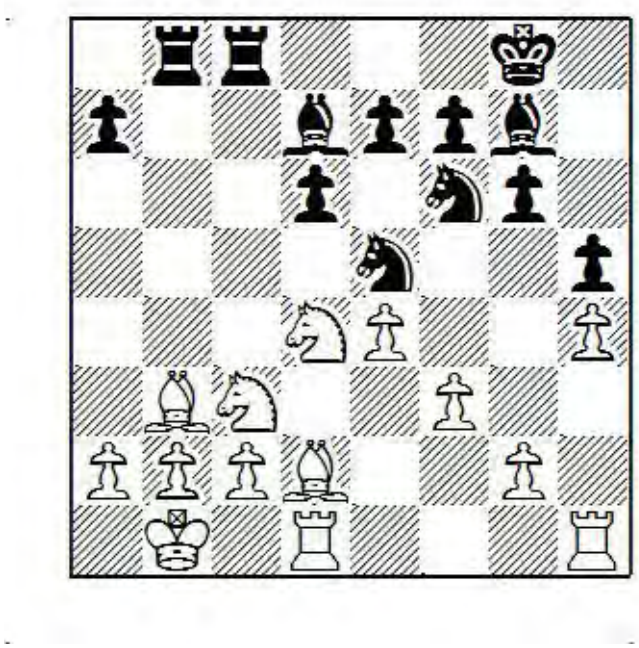
b) 19 Rd3 Rcb4! 20 Ndb5 Bxb5 21 axb5 Nd7 22 b3 Ne5 23 Rd4 Ng4 24 Rd3 Nxe3 25 Rxe3 Kf8 is very comfortable for Black, M.Schlosser-C.Ward, Oakham 1990.

c) 19 Ncb5 Bxb5 (19 ... Rxa4 20 Nc3 Rab4 21 Nd1 h5 seems like an obvious improvement and it looks very nice for Black) 20 Nxb5 Rxa4 21 Rd4 Rb4 22 Rxb4 axb4 23 Nd4 Rc8 24 Ne2 d5 25 e5 Nd7 26 f4 e6 and we have an interesting endgame with chances to both sides, D.Dochev-S.Ovsejevitsch, Pardubice 1998.

15 ... Rab8

Another option is 15 ... Nc4, as played in M.Solleveld-P.Tregubov, Amsterdam 2000, is also worth consideration: 16 Nc3 Nxd2+ 17 Rxd2 h5 18 Re1 Rc5 19 g3 Rb8 20 Ka1 Kf8 21 Rd3 Be8 22 f4 Ng4 23 a3 e6 24 Rf1 Bd7 25 Ka2 Ke7, and Black has decent compensation for the pawn and in fact went on to win the game.

16 Nc3 h5



Question: Hey, did Black not just lose a pawn?

Answer: Yes, he did. He sacrificed a pawn and entered an endgame. But things are not that simple, and it turns out that with the open b- and c-files, Black has pretty decent compensation for the pawn.

Black decides to restrain White on the kingside. Two other options worthy of consideration are:

a) 16 ... a5 17 a4 Nc4 18 Bc1 h5 19 Rhe1 Be8 20 Ndb5 Kf8 21 Re2 Nd7 22 Ka2 Ncb6 23 Nd5 Nxd5 24 exd5 Nb6 25 c3 Bxb5 26 axb5 Rc5 27 Bg5 Bf6! 28 Bxf6 exf6 and Black has a comfortable position, K.Szabo-E.Anka, Hungary 2008.

b) 16 ... Nc4 17 Bc1 h5 18 Nde2 a5 19 a4 Be8 (stopping any tricks with e4-e5) 20 Nd4 (White does better to secure the queenside with 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 b3 Nd7 22 Nb5 Rcc8 23 Bb2 and emerges with the better game) 20 ... Nb6 21 Ndb5 Nfd7 22 Bg5 Kf8 23 Nd5 Nxd5 24 exd5 Nc5 and Black has already taken over the initiative, A.Kovacevic-M.Markovic, Niksic 1997.

17 Rhe1 Be8 18 Ka1 Kf8 19 Bg5 a5 20 f4 Nc4 21 e5 a4 22 Bxc4 Rxc4 23 a3 dxe5

Fantastic complications follow 23 ... Ng4 with one admittedly long line running 24 Nd5 (24 exd6? Bxd4 25 Re4 Ne3 is good for Black) 24 ... Rb7 25 Nxe7 dxe5 26 Nxg6+ fxg6 27 Ne6+ Kg8 28 Rd8 Kf7 29 Nxg7 Bc6 30 fxe5 Kxg7 31 e6 Rxc2 32 e7 Rbxb2 33 e8Q Bxe8 34 Rexe8 and Black is forced to take a

draw by perpetual check.

24 fxe5 Ng4 25 Nd5 Rb7 26 Ne3 Rc8

After 26 ... Nxe3 27 Rxe3 Rc5 28 Bf4 Rd5 29 Re4 Bd7, Black has decent compensation for the pawn.

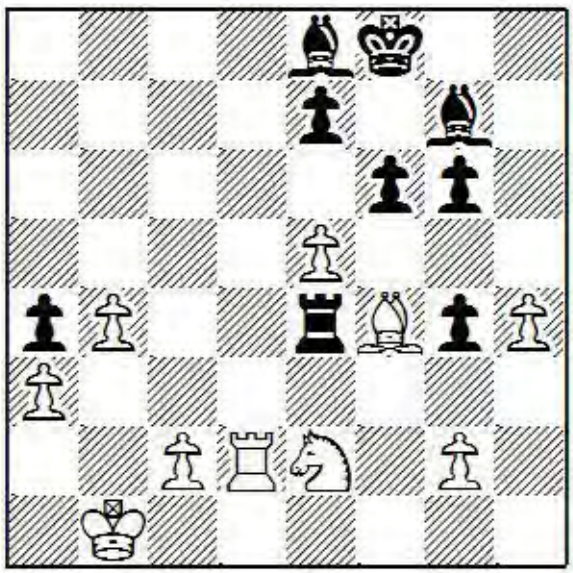
27 Nxg4 hxg4 28 Bf4 Rd7 29 Kb1 Rdd8 30 b4?! Rc4?

Either a bad move or a calculated risk. In either case, the objectively best continuation is 30 ... axb3 31 cxb3 Rd5 and now one possible line is 32 Nc2 Bc6 33 Ne3 Ra5 34 Kb2 Bxe5+ 35 Bxe5 Rxe5 36 Nxg4 Rxe1 37 Rxe1 Bxg2 with a complicated endgame.

31 Ne2?

Possibly in time trouble, White starts floundering. The committal 31 Ne6+ fxe6 32 Rxd8 Rxf4 33 b5 Kf7 34 c4 looks promising for White.

31 ... Rxd1+ 32 Rxd1 Re4 33 Rd2 f6?!



Black understandably wants to get his dark-squared bishop in on the action, and preferably without risking to exchange it, but this is not the right way of doing it. The solid 33 ... e6 followed by ... Bxe5 looks like the correct way forward.

34 Bg3??

This is a pretty bad blunder that sends White right into the losing zone after having held the advantage for most of the game. White should have continued with 34 exf6 exf6 35 g3 f5 36 c3 and though White still has an edge, converting it will be far from easy.

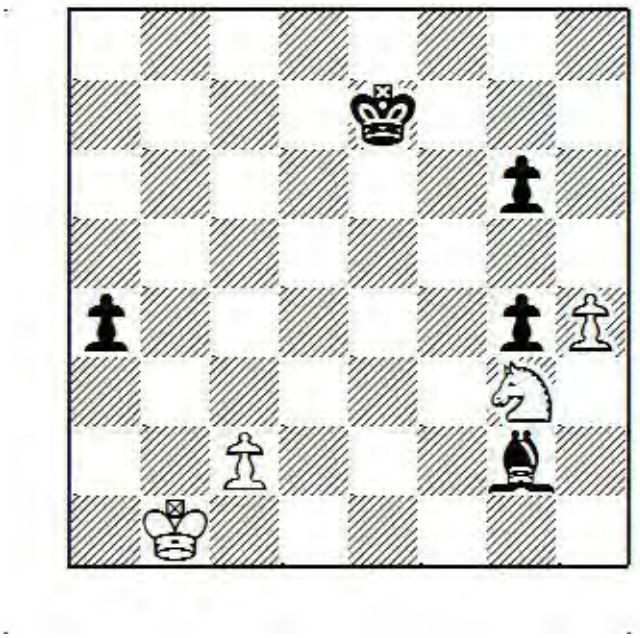
34 ... Bh6!

Whoopsie! Now White loses a pawn and is forced to enter an endgame with Black's bishop pair being ridiculously strong. In other words, White is close to being lost. What a twist of fate!

35 Nc3

The only way to avoid losing a piece.

35 ... Rxb4+ 36 axb4 Bxd2 37 Ne4 Bxb4 38 exf6 Bc6! 39 fxe7+ Kxe7 40 Nf2 Be1 41 Ne4 Bxg3 42 Nxg3 Bxg2



White managed to eliminate the bishop pair, but the knight is a lousy defender against passed pawns and Black happens to have two of them!

43 h5 gxh5 44 Nxh5

One more pawn has been eliminated. If now White could only manage to sacrifice his knight for the g-pawn, then he would have a draw on account of the bishop being of the wrong colour square.

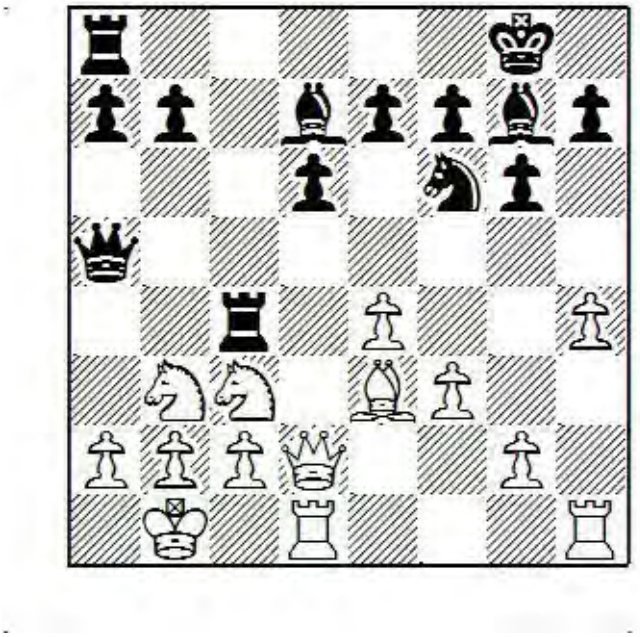
44 ... Bc6 45 Kb2 Kd6 46 c4 Ke5 47 Kc3 Be8 48 Ng3 Kf4 49 Ne2+ Ke5 50 Ng3 Bg6 0-1

Game 68
I.Ortiz Suarez-J.Obregon Rivero
Pamplona 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2 Qa5 11 0-0-0 Rfc8 12 h4 Ne5 13 Kb1 Nc4

This is the other main line after 13 Kb1.

14 Bxc4 Rxc4 15 Nb3



15 ... Qe5!?

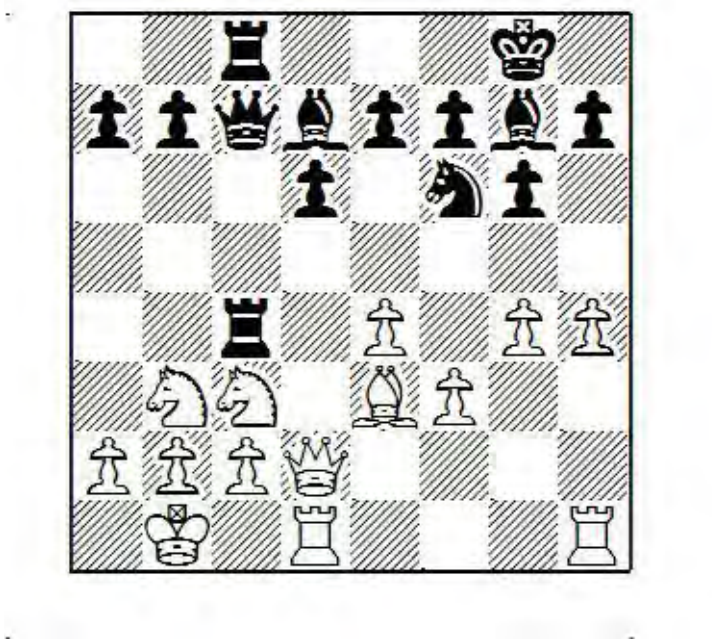
Question: Is the queen really safe in the centre?

Answer: Safe is a relative term, but the move is playable.

Normally, the primary attention goes to 15 ... Qc7 which has certainly also seen more action than our text move. Now White has tried a number of things, several of which look very promising for White:

a) White's strongest established option is 16 g4.

a1) 16 ... Rc8 (16 ... b5? 17 e5 b4 18 exf6 bxc3 19 Qd5 Rc8 20 fxg7 cxb2 was tested in A.Areshchenko-N.Olenin, Nikolaev 2001, and now 21 h5 is very uncomfortable for Black while 16 ... Bxg4? does not even come close to working for Black as after 17 fxg4 Nxe4 18 Nxe4 Rxe4 19 h5 Rc8 20 Bd4 e5 21 Bc3 Rd8, A.Zapata-B.Gonzalez, Valencia 2000, 22 g5 d5 23 hxg6 hxg6 24 Qg2 (threatening Rxd5) is strong for White), White has a powerful hit.



Here, the temporary pawn sacrifice 17 e5! Ne8 (17 ... dxe5 is met by 18 g5, winning a piece for a couple of pawns, which in this position certainly is not enough) 18 Nd5 Qd8 19 exd6 is highly problematic for Black:

a11) 19 ... exd6 is an ugly move and if this is necessary for Black to stay in the game, then something has already gone wrong. In S.Karjakin-D.Vocaturo, Saint Vincent 2005, White comfortably held Black at bay after 20 c3 Nf6 21 Bg5 Bc6 22 Nxf6+ Bxf6 23 Rh3 b5 24 Bxf6 Qxf6 25 Qxd6 Qf4? 26 Na5 Qxd6 27 Rxd6 Rc5 28 a3! Ba8 29 Nb3 Re5 30 Nd4 Re3 31 Kc1 with an extra pawn and a dominating d4-knight. White is well on his way to win this game.

a12) 19 ... Nxd6 20 c3 Bc6 (20 ... Nb5 21 Bg5! Bf8 22 h5 has Black's position collapsing and 20 ... b6 21 h5 Bc6 22 hxg6 fxg6 23 Qh2 is a disaster for Black) 21 Rhe1 Bxd5 22 Qxd5 b5 23 Bg5 Bf8 24 Qe5 and Black is clearly struggling to stay in the game, G.Timoshenko-I.Mutschnik, Alushta 2001.

a13) 19 ... Rxc2 is a suggestion by Ward and is relatively best, but after 20 dxe7 Rxd2 21 Rxd2, Black is forced to play 21 ... Bf5+ 22 gxf5 Qd6 23 Nb6 Qxe7 24 Bg5 Qc7 25 Rc1 Qxc1+ 26 Nxc1 axb6 27 Rd7 and White has the better chances.

a2) 16 ... Be6 17 h5 a5 (17 ... Rc8 18 Bd4 gives White a large advantage) 18 Nd4 Rxc3 19 Nxe6 fxe6 20 Qxc3 Qxc3 21 bxc3 Nd7 22 Bd4 and Black does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn in B.Macieja-O.Salmensuu, Saint-Vincent 2000.

b) 16 h5 is met with the standard Dragon response in 16 ... Rxc3! 17 Qxc3 Qxc3 18 bxc3 Nxh5 19 Bd4 Be6 20 Bxg7 Nxg7 21 Rhe1 Rc8 22 Kb2 and Black had the standard compensation for the exchange, Wang Hao-V.Gashimov, Istanbul 2005.

c) 16 Bd4 Be6 17 h5 a5 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 Be3!? (19 a4 intends to prevent ... b7-b5, but Black plays it anyway ... 19 ... b5 20 Nxb5 Qb7 21 Nc3 (21 e5 dxe5 22 Bxe5 is very likely a better choice) 21 ... Rb8 22 Qf2 Rb4 23 Bxf6? (23 g4!? is better) 23 ... Bxf6 24 Nd5 Bxd5 25 Rxd5 was played in G.Sax-I.Gaponenko, Balatonlelle 2008, and now the strongest continuation for Black is 25 ... Bxb2! 26 Rb5 Rxb5 27 axb5 Bc3 28 Qe2 Qxb5 29 Qxb5 Rxb5 with winning chances for Black) 19 ... Qb8 20 Nd4 b5

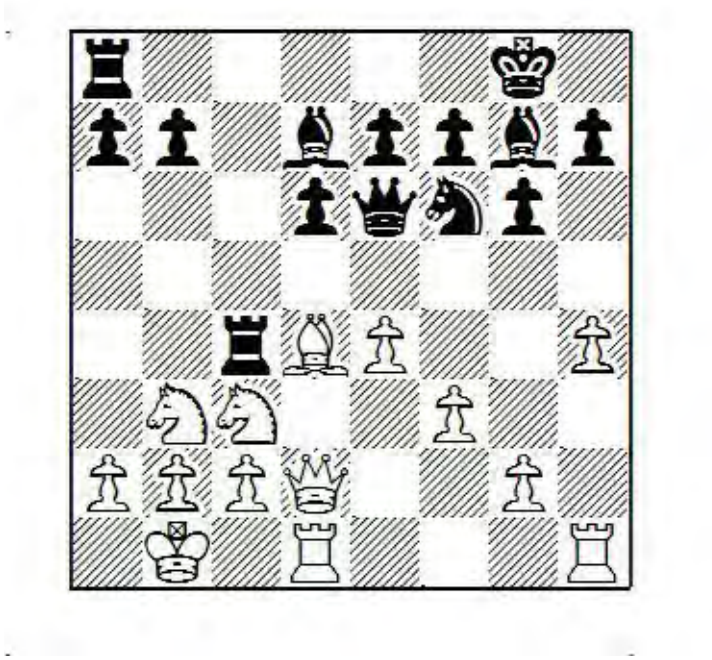
21 Nce2 Bd7 22 g4 and White has a very good game, T.Gharamian-A.Hoffman, San Sebastian 2012.

Apart from 15 ... Qc7, both 15 ... Qd8 and 15 ... Qa6 have been played, though they offer Black significantly less chances than the text move.

16 Bd4!

White will be in for a torrid time after 16 f4?! as Black has the stunning queen sacrifice 16 ... Qxc3! 17 bxc3 Nxe4 18 Qe1 Nxc3+ 19 Kc1 Nxa2+ 20 Kb1 Nc3+ 21 Kc1 Rc8.

16 ... Qe6



Question: This really does not look comfortable for Black, does it?

Answer: Again, comfort is a relative term. But you are right, the queen looks a little off being tucked on the e6-square. I suspect that this is one of the reasons why this particular variation never took off in comparison with 15 ... Qc7.

17 h5

It is hardly a surprise that with Black's queen awkwardly placed on e6, White has more than one good move:

a) Also strong is 17 g4 Rac8 18 Rhe1 (18 h5!? Be8 19 Qe3 looks very nice for White) 18 ... Bc6 19 Nd5 Ba4 20 c3 b5 21 Qh2 Nxd5 22 exd5 with nice pressure for White, J.Koch-N.Ristic, Dortmund 1989.

b) Central play with 17 Rhe1 Bc6 18 Qd3 a5?! 19 e5! Rxc3 20 Bxc3 Nd5 occurred in T.Thorhallsson-J.Tisdall, Gausdal 1996, and now 21 Nd4 Qd7 22 Nxc6 bxc6 23 Bd4 would have been simplest. Black is an exchange down without any compensation.

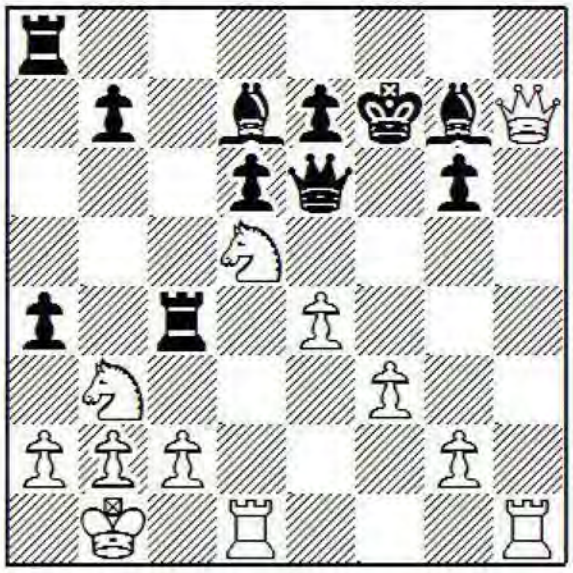
17 ... a5 18 hxg6

We have seen the positional approach h5-h6 in a couple of lines. Here too it has been tried with 18 h6 Bh8 19 Nd5 a4 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Nxf6+ Qxf6 22 Nd4 Rac8 and here White should have continued with 23 a3, because after 23 Rhe1? a3 24 bxa3 Ba4 25 Re2 Qe5 26 Nb3 as played in M.Hebden-B.Jonsson, London 1988, now 26 ... Rxc2 27 Qxc2 Rxc2 28 Rxc2 f5 would have left Black with a strong initiative.

18 ... fxg6 19 Nd5 a4 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Qh6 Bg7

If Black tries to guard the h-pawn with 21 ... Qf7, then 22 Nb6 axb3 23 cxb3 leaves both of Black's rooks and the d7-bishop threatened by the knight. After 23 ... Rcc8 24 Nxd7, White is a pawn up with the clearly better chances to boot.

22 Qxh7+ Kf7



23 Rh4??

A gigantic blunder by a strong player. After the correct 23 Nc1 Qe5 24 Nd3 Qg3 25 Qh4 Qxh4 26 Rxh4, White has an extra pawn and a clear advantage.

23 ... Qe5 24 Rf4+ Bf5 25 Rxf5+ gxf5 26 Qh5+ Kf8

The most accurate continuation is 26 ... Kg8! 27 c3 axb3 and Black is a whole rook up.

27 c3 axb3 28 Nb6

All the black pieces get to participate in the attack.

28 ... bxa2+

Even stronger is 28 ... Qb5! 29 Nxa8 (29 Nxc4 bxa2+ 30 Ka1 Qxc4 31 Qxf5+ Kg8 and Black emerges with an extra piece) 29 ... Rc5 30 axb3 fxe4 31 Qg4 Bxc3 32 fxe4 Qxb3 33 Qf3+ Ke8 and Black is winning.

29 Ka1 Qb5 30 Nxa8 Rxc3 31 Qxf5+ Qxf5 32 exf5 Rc6 33 Rd3?

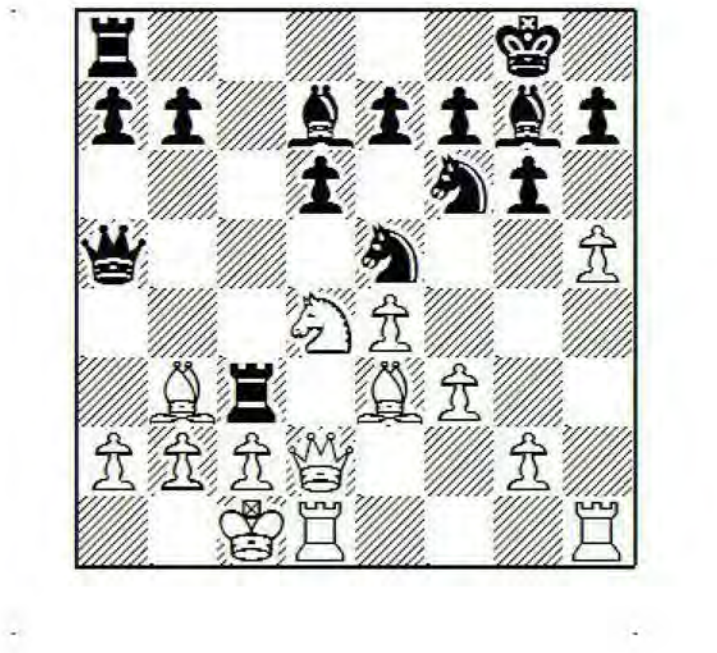
Now White loses promptly. After 33 g4 b5 34 g5 Be5, White is still hanging on.

33 ... Ra6 34 Rb3 Rxa8 35 Rxb7 d5 36 g4 d4 37 Rb3 d3 0-1

With no way of stopping the d-pawn from advancing towards the promotion square, White resigned.

Game 69
F.Manca-M.Cebalo
Saint Vincent 2004

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 h4 Qa5 11 0-0-0 Rfc8 12 Bb3 Ne5 13 h5 Rxc3



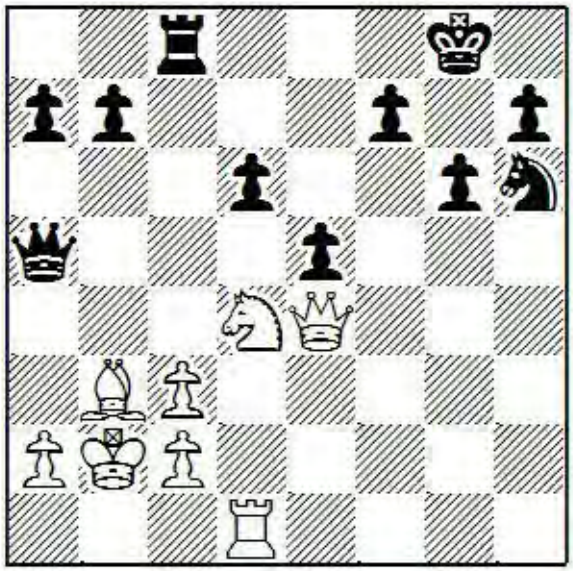
Question: Now we are talking! How about the pawn on h5? Can it be taken?

Answer: Of course Black can take the pawn on h5, but it normally does nothing other than transpose. That's why I find it aesthetically pleasing and there is the satisfaction of flicking in this exchange sacrifice without hesitation. But let's take a look at the other move order with13 ... Nxh5:

a) 14 g4 Nf6 15 Bh6 and now we have:

a1) 15 ... Bxh6!? 16 Rxh6 (16 Qxh6 Rxc3 17 bxc3 Qxc3 and if now 18 Ne2?, then 18 ... Qa1+ 19 Kd2 Nxf3+ 20 Ke3 Qxd1 21 Rxd1 Nxg4+ 22 Kxf3 Nxh6 when White is missing a few pawns) 16 ... Rxc3 17 Qxc3 Qxc3 18 bxc3 Rc8 19 Kd2 b5 (19 ... Kg7 20 Rh4 g5 21 Rh2 Rc5 22 Re1 e6 was played in D.Holmes-C.Ward, London 1991, when Black went on to win an interesting endgame) 20 Rhh1 a5 (my computer likes 20 ... Bxg4 21 fxg4 Nxe4+ 22 Ke1 Rxc3 with a little handful of pawns for the rook) 21 a3 Rc5 22 Rb1 Kg7 23 Ba2 Nxf3+!? 24 Nxf3 Nxe4+ 25 Kc1 Nxc3 26 Rb2 was G.Milos-I.Vera, Sao Paulo 2004, and now Black had the opportunity to play the following amusing line 26 ... Bxg4 27 Nd2 Na4 28 Rb3 Bf5 29 Bb1 Nc3 30 Kb2 Nxb1 31 Nxb1 Rxc2+ 32 Ka1 Be6 33 Rb2 Rc5 with no less than six pawns for the rook, Black should be winning handily.

a2) 15 ... Rxc3 is a fascinating alternative, for instance, after 16 bxc3 Bxh6 17 Rxh6 Rc8 18 Kb2 Bxg4 19 fxg4 Nxe4 20 Qh2 Nxg4 21 Qh4 Nxh6 22 Qxe4 e5, an interesting position arises.

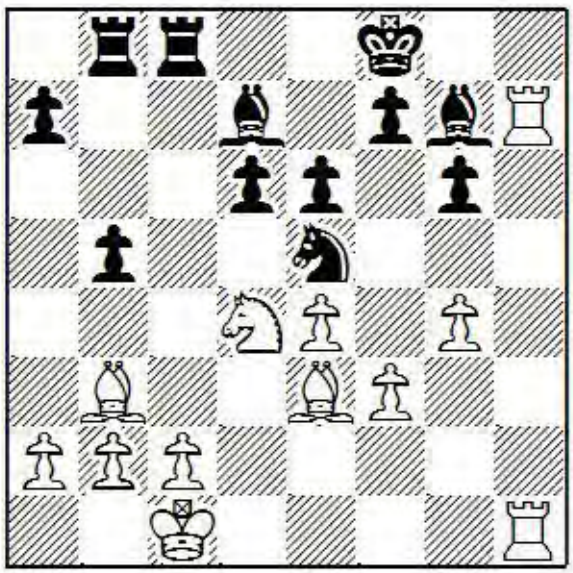


Black has a lovely collection of pawns for the piece with mutual chances.

b) The fact that White has 14 Nd5!? available speaks heavily to the fact that Black should put it out of its misery on move 13. The unfortunate fact is that in this position, it makes good sense for White to play this move. After 14 ... Qxd2+ 15 Rxd2 Kf8 16 g4 Nf6 17 Rdh2 (17 Nxf6 Bxf6 18 Rxh7 b5 19 Rdh2 e6 is probably about equal) 17 ... Nxd5 18 Bxd5, Black has a few options:

b1) 18 ... Nc6?! 19 Nxc6! bxc6 20 Bc4 h6 21 Bxh6 Bxh6+ 22 Rxh6 e6 23 f4! (Nunn expertly puts the squeeze on Black, intending here to set up a clamp on the dark squares) 23 ... Ke7 24 e5 dxe5 25 fxe5 a5 26 Rh7 a4 27 Rf1 Be8 28 Rf6 with a clear advantage for White, J.Nunn-C.Ward, Hastings 1998.

b2) In M.Pavlovic-V.Rajlich, Belgrade 2001, Black played 18 ... Rc7, but after 19 Rxh7 Rac8 20 Kb1 e6 21 Bb3 a5 22 a3 Nc4 23 Bxc4 Rxc4 24 c3, White had the slightly better chances. b3) Instead, my suggestion is for Black to play 18 ... Rab8 19 Rxh7 e6 20 Bb3 b5.



Black appears to be holding up fine.

c) 14 Kb1 Rxc3 15 bxc3 Rc8 16 Bh6 Qxc3 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Qxc3 Rxc3 and although Black ended up losing this endgame, Black has the better chances at this point, A.Sherzer-V.Rajlich, Budapest 2001.

d) After 14 Bh6, Black has:

d1) 14 ... Bxh6 15 Qxh6 Rxc3 16 bxc3 Nf6 (16 ... Qxc3?! 17 Ne2 Qc5 18 g4 Nf6 19 g5 Nh5 20 Rxh5! gxh5 21 Rh1 Qe3+? and Black collapses (better is 21 ... Ng6! 22 Qxh5 e6 23 Qxh7+ Kf8, and Black is holding up) 22 Kb1 Qxf3 23 Rxh5 e6 24 g6 Nxg6 25 Qxh7+ Kf8 26 Rf5, and it was soon game over, A.Karpov-E.Gik, Moscow 1968) 17 Kb1! Rc8 18 Ne2 Bb5 (18 ... Nc4 19 Nf4 e6 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Ne2

is neither better nor worse) 19 Nf4 Bc4 20 Nh3 Rc6 21 Ng5 Bxb3 22 cxb3 Qxc3 23 Nxh7 Qc2+ 24 Ka1 Qc3+ 25 Kb1 Qc2+ with a draw – analysis by Ward.

d2) The game peters to equality after 14 ... Nd3+ 15 Kb1 Nxb2! 16 Kxb2 Bxh6 17 Qxh6 Qxc3+ 18 Kb1 a5 19 Rxh5! gxh5 20 Qg5+ Kh8 21 Qxe7 Be6 22 Qf6+ Kg8 23 Bxe6 fxe6 24 Qxe6+ with a draw by perpetual check.

14 Qxc3

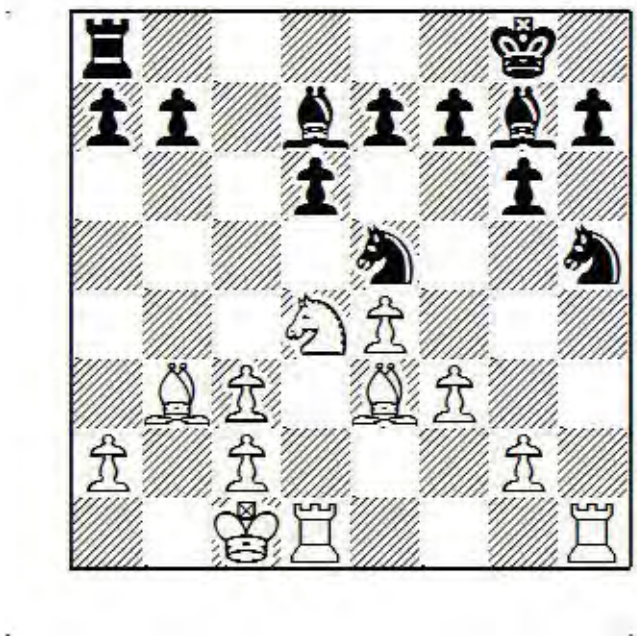
A look at the other options:

a) 14 bxc3 Nxh5 transposes into the 13 ... Nxh5 14 g4 Nf6 15 Bh6 Bxh6 16 Qxh6 Rxc3 17 bxc3 line we looked at above.

b) On 14 hxg6, Black retreats the rook 14 ... Rc5 15 gxh7+ (15 gxf7+ Kf8!) 15 ... Nxh7 (15 ... Kh8 16 c3 Nc4 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Kb1 may almost give White enough for the piece) 16 Nf5 Bxf5 17 Bxc5 Qxc5 18 exf5 Nc4 19 Qd5 Rc8 and Black has the better chances.

c) Finally, Ward looks a bit at 14 h6 Rc5 (14 ... Nd3+?! 15 Kb1 Nxb2 16 Kxb2 Rxb3+ 17 cxb3 is clearly better for White as indicated by Ward) 15 Qxa5 Rxa5 16 hxg7 Kxg7 17 g4 Rc8 18 Kb1 b6 and Black is just a tiny bit better even with his extra pawn.

14 ... Qxc3 15 bxc3 Nxh5



Question: Okay, so now we are in an endgame of sorts. How should this be evaluated?

Answer: This is in some ways a typical Dragon endgame where Black is an exchange down (after thematically sacking it on c3) and in return he has a pawn, the one White sacrificed to open the h-file. Considering the results so far, I will conclude that Black is doing fine, although I will stop short claiming an advantage for Black. That being said, he should not be afraid to enter this line.

16 g4

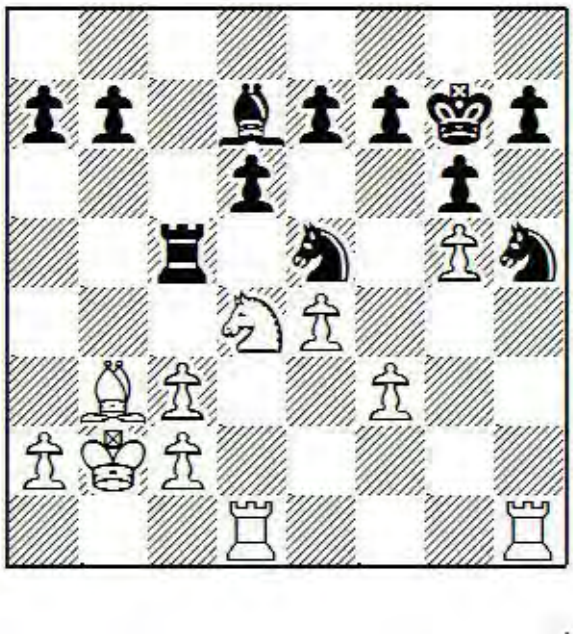
A different approach is 16 Rhe1, where White aims to make a push in the centre. After 16 ... Rc8 17 Kb2 (17 Kb1 Nf6 18 g4 b5 19 g5 Nh5 20 Rf1 a5 21 a3 Kf8 22 Rh1 a4 23 Ba2 was played in I.Sipos-E.Kahn, Budapest 2001, and now Black could have kept a clear advantage with 23 ... Rxc3 24 Bc1 Nxf3 25 Nxf3 Rxf3) 17 ... a5 18 a3 Nf6 19 Ne2 h5 20 Bd4 Kf8 21 f4 Neg4 22 e5 Ne8 23 Ng1 Bh6 24 Nh3 Bc6 25 Re2 a4 26 Ba2 dxe5 27 fxe5 e6 and with all of White's pawns fixed on their on their files and squares, it is clear that Black with his minor pieces and many targets to work on has taken over the game. Thus Black holds a small, but pretty clear advantage, M.Erdogdu-K.Haznedaroglu, Bucharest 2009.

16 ... Nf6 17 Bh6

With 17 g5, White tries to sideline the knight but after 17 ... Nh5 18 Rde1 Rc8 19 f4 which was played

in G.Staub-A.Habibi, Lugano 2000, Black could now have obtained the better chances with 19 ... Nc4 20 Rh4 e5 21 fxe5 Bxe5, leaving White with a ugly collection of pawns and very poor piece coordination.

17 ... Rc8 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 g5 Nh5 20 Kb2 Rc5



Question: Is it safe to say, that Black has made significant progress and has the better chances?

Answer: Objectively speaking, White probably still is not worse, but it is difficult to find a good active plan. Black, on the other hand, has numerous targets to start massaging and can do so at leisure.

21 Rh2 b5 22 Rdh1 Nc4+ 23 Bxc4 bxc4 24 Rg1 Nf4 25 Rgh1 Rxg5

My computer gives preference to repeating the moves with 25 ... Nh5, but obviously that is not how you win chess games. Nevertheless, the game continuation is according to my silicon friend only marginally worse than repeating moves, so why not try it?

26 Rxh7+ Kf6 27 R1h2 Rg3 28 Rh8?!

Black's investment is already paying off, White is starting to play inaccurately. The correct move is 28 Rd2 to discourage Black from playing ... e7-e5.

28 ... e5 29 Ne2 Rxf3 30 Ra8 Bc6 31 Rxa7 Bxe4

White has succeeded in getting a passed pawn on the a-file, but Black has three connected passers on the e-, f- and g-files and those are far more dangerous.

32 a4

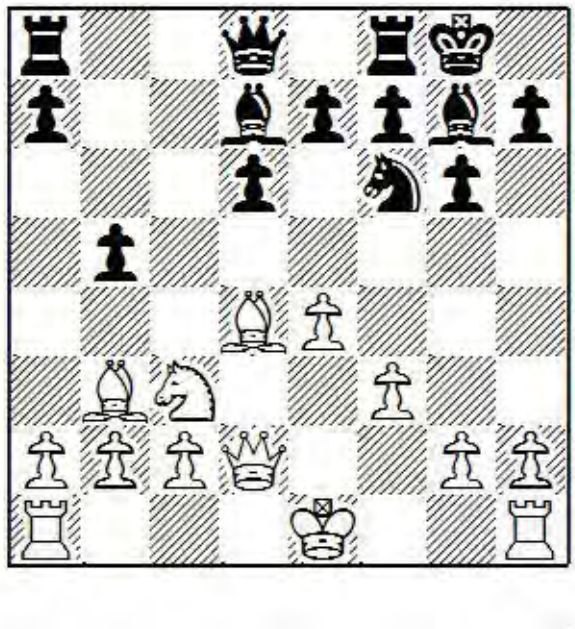
Passed pawns must be pushed.

32 ... Re3 33 Nxf4 exf4 34 Rh7 Bd5 35 Rd7 f3 36 Rxd6+ Ke5 37 Rxd5+ Kxd5 38 Rxf7 g5 39 a5 g4 40 a6 Re6 41 a7 Ra6 42 Kc1 Ke4 43 Kd2 g3 44 Rg7 g2 0-1

With no meaningful way to stop both pawns, White resigned.

Chapter Fourteen
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: The Accelerated Variation – 10 Bb3 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 Bb3 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5



Here we are dealing with a very interesting case, a variation that can arise from two different but related openings. The first time I knew of it was when I co-wrote the book *The Sicilian Accelerated Dragon* with Grandmaster Peter Heine Nielsen, nowadays the coach/second for World Champion Magnus Carlsen. He had won a very good game with the line at the Moscow Olympiad and covered it in the book, when I really thought it really should belong in a book about the Dragon. Others have thought so too and therefore the coverage of this variation has been a little iffy. For the sake of completeness, the Accelerated Dragon move order is 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2 (or 10 h4) 10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5. The point of this pawn thrust is to exploit the fact that White has played Bb3 early and thus, his control of the ... b5-square is lessened and Black thus makes a queenside space grab.

One of the key aspects of the line nowadays is that with the early bishop retreat, White avoids the Chinese Dragon as 10 ... Rb8 is considered imprecise after 10 Bb3. This is because White will start his kingside attack immediately instead of castling queenside, thus saving at least a tempo.

This line also bears a lot of resemblance to the Topalov Variation, but is more multi-directional in its purpose. Also, because White has not yet castled queenside, there are a whole bunch of new considerations to make. The variation has a lot of pedigree too with players like Topalov, Shirov, Carlsen, Bu Xiangzhi and the women's world champion Hou Yifan playing the variation in the last few years.

In Game 70, one of the major specialists or the Accelerated Dragon, Guseinov, faces the immediate 12 a4, a line which is not considered particularly dangerous. A similar idea is seen in Game 71, where White first plays 12 h4 and then in response 12 ... a5, White plays 13 a4. Then finally, we also have the case where White allows Black to play ... a5-a4 himself after 13 h5 as discussed in Game 72.

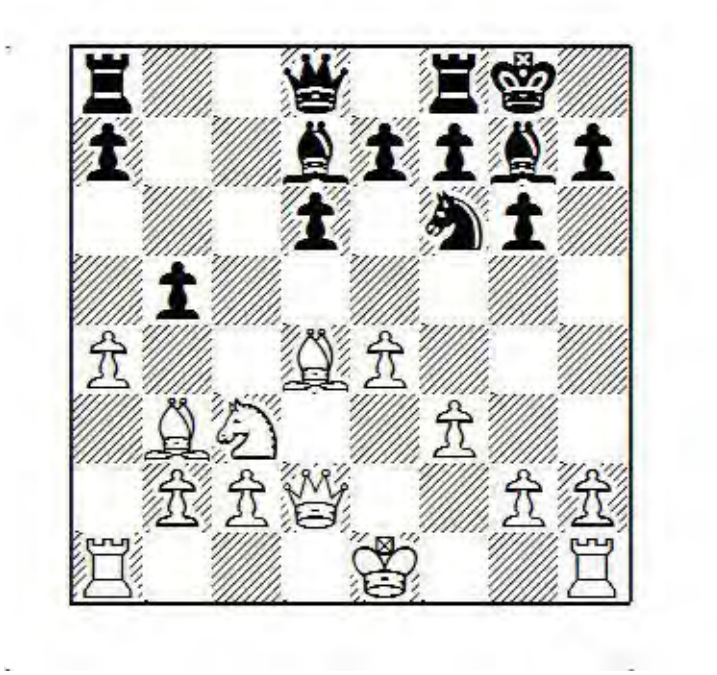
Game 70
O.Kurmann-G.Guseinov
Aix-les-Bains 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 g6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2

This is the Accelerated Dragon move order, which is not a surprise as Guseinov is a renowned specialist of the opening. Instead, the Dragon path to reach this position is 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 Bb3.

10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5 12 a4

White fights for queenside space and forces Black to commit his b-pawn.



Question: We have not seen much of this move in the last couple of chapters. I guess this line really is a lot different from the others?

Answer: Absolutely! With the king still able to castle kingside, some new options are available to play for White.

12 ... bxa4

If Black does not like the scenario with the isolated a-pawn, then 12 ... b4 can be considered. It has been played a couple of times by Carlsen, so it cannot be completely terrible, but it is not completely comfortable either.

After 13 Nd5 Nxd5 White has two options:

a) 14 exd5 is considered fine for Black after 14 ... Bxd4 15 Qxd4 Qa5 16 h4 (16 0-0 Rac8 17 Rfe1 Rfe8 18 Kh1 Qc5 19 Qh4 accomplished nothing for White and here a draw was agreed in V.Anand-M.Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2010) 16 ... e5 17 dxe6 Bxe6 18 0-0-0 Rfe8 19 Bxe6 Rxe6 20 Qd5 Qxd5 21 Rxd5 Rc8 and although Black's pawns are somewhat weaker than White's, the two active rooks provide adequate counterplay, A.Lastin-A.Evdokimov, Taganrog 2011.

b) 14 Bxg7 is more accurate and after 14 ... Kxg7 15 exd5 a5 16 h4 e5 17 dxe6 Bxe6 18 0-0-0 Bxb3 19 cxb3 Re8 20 h5 Qf6 21 h6+ Kf8 22 Kb1 Rad8 23 Qf2, Black has an uncomfortable position. S.Ganguly-A.D.Nguyen. Jakarta 2012.His king is more vulnerable than White's which makes White's position easier to play.

13 Bxa4

Occasionally White also tries 13 Nxa4 which is considered fairly harmless, say after 13 ... Be6!? 14 Bxe6 fxe6 15 0-0 Qc7 16 Nc3 a5 17 Kh1 (or 17 Ra2 Rfc8 18 Rc1 Nd7 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Nd1 Ne5 21 Ne3 Qc5 and Black's piece activity easily outweighed his pawn weaknesses, H.Blanco Ronquillo-E.Iturrizaga Bonelli, Guarenas 2012) 17 ... Rab8 18 Ne2 a4 19 Rxa4 Nxe4 20 Qe3 Qxc2 and now rather than 21 Ra7?? (White should have played 21 Bxg7! Qxa4 22 Bxf8 Rxf8 23 b3! Qb4 24 Nd4 e5 25 Nc6 Qb5 26 Nxe7+ Kg7 and Black has no more than a slight initiative) which loses on the spot to 21 ... e5 22

Rxe7 exd4 23 Nxd4 Bxd4 24 Qxd4 Nf6 25 Qxd6 Rxb2 and White is a piece down for nothing, Chu Wei Chao-Bu Xiangzhi, Tianjin 2013.

13 ... Bxa4

Let's look at the other tries:

a) Less sensible is 13 ... Be6 because Black eventually will want to exchange these bishops. After 14 0-0 Qc7 15 Bb5 Rfb8 16 Ra6 Bc8 17 Ra4 Bd7 18 Bxd7 Nxd7 19 Nd5 Bxd4+ 20 Rxd4 Qd8 21 b3 Rc8 22 Ra1 Nb6, T.Burg-B.Alterman, Eilat 2012, now 23 Ne3 would leave White with a nice positional squeeze.

b) Two top guns have played 13 ... a5 at this juncture. While I think it may be slightly premature, it is certainly better to do it here than after the exchange on a4, when White has the rook aggressively placed on a4. After 14 0-0 Qc7 (or 14 ... Rb8 15 Bxd7 Qxd7 16 b3 Qc7 17 Rf2?! e6 18 Qd3 d5 19 exd5 Rfd8 20 Qe3?! Nxd5 21 Nxd5 Bxd4 22 Qxd4 Rxd5 23 Qe3 Re5 24 Qc1 Rd8 and Black has completely taken over the initiative, F.Vallejo Pons-V.Topalov, Leon 2012) 15 Rfd1 Rfb8 16 Bxd7 Qxd7 17 b3 Rb4 18 Ne2 Qb7 19 Kh1 Nd7 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Nf4 Nf6 22 Nd3 Rb5 23 Ra4 Rc8 24 Rda1 which was played in Hou Yifan-A.Shirov, Tromso 2013, White eventually managed to win. But at this point, Black can consider 24 ... Qb6 followed by ... e7-e6 and he should be fine.

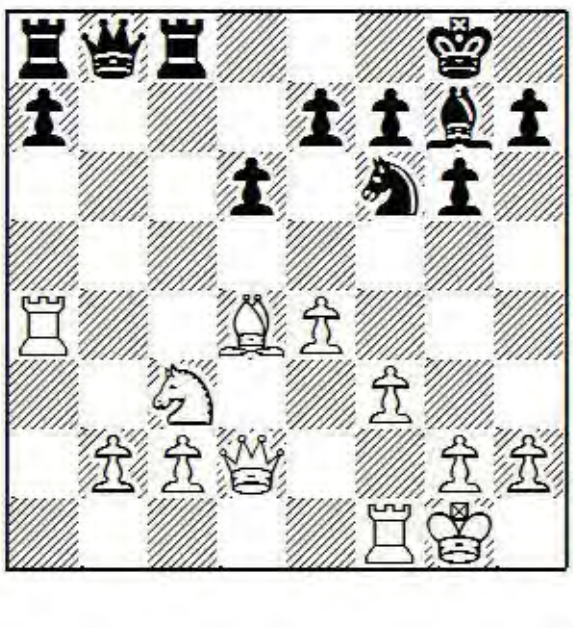
14 Rxa4 Qb8

Question: This looks like Black is already on the defensive, isn't it?

Answer: If you consider protecting a pawn that your opponent is threatening as being on the defensive, then sure, Black is on the defensive. But right now, it is also a practical move which potentially threatens the b2-pawn while making room for the other rook to move to c8.

Committing the pawn with 14 ... a5 right away may be premature. In one game, White continued with 15 0-0 Nd7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qd4+! e5 (Black aggressively pursues counterplay, even at the cost of a pawn though both 17 ... Nf6 18 Nb5 and 17 ... Kg8 18 Nd5 leave Black quite passive) 18 Qxd6 Nb6 19 Qxd8 Rfxd8 20 Ra2! Rdc8 21 Rd1 a4 22 Rd3 Nc4 when Black's pieces are very active, but after 23 b3 axb3 24 Rxa8 Rxa8 25 cxb3, he ultimately does not have full compensation for the pawn, though in D.Jakovenko-S.Maze, Fuegen 2006, the Russian grandmaster managed to squeeze a full point out of this endgame.

15 0-0 Rc8



16 b3

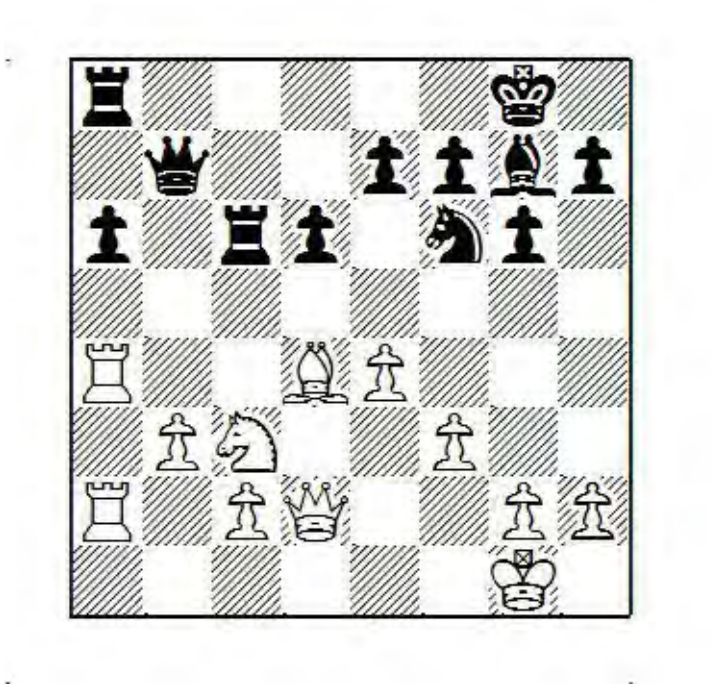
White has also tried playing without b2-b3 to avoiding weakening the dark squares. After 16 Rb1 Qb7

17 Kh1 a6 18 h3 Rc6 (18 ... e6 followed by ... Rc6 and ... Nd7 is possibly a better idea.) 19 Nd5 Nxd5 20 exd5 Rc7 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Rh4 h5 23 c3 Rac8 (the immediate 23 ... a5 also looks strong, intending to push it further forward and put pressure on White's queenside pawns) 24 Re1 Rc4 25 Rhe4 Rxe4 26 Rxe4 a5 and Black has a comfortable game, not too unlike what we will see later in our main game, Z.Efimenko-E.Vorobiov, Moscow 2013.

16 ... Qb7 17 Rfa1 a6 18 R1a2

In L.Van Wely-Hou Yifan, Wijk aan Zee 2013, White gained a small advantage with 18 Qd3!?, eyeing the a-pawn. After 18 ... Rc6 (or 18 ... Nd7 19 Bxg7 Nc5 20 Qd5 Kxg7 21 Rc4 with some pressure for White, although it is not very much to work with) 19 Nd1 Nd7 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Qd4+ Nf6 22 Ne3 Qb5 23 Ra5 Qb7 24 g4 h6 25 h4 e5 26 Qd2, Black has a solid position, while White has more space and the more active pieces.

18 ... Rc6



Question: I'm still concerned about Black's position. He has a very isolated a-pawn that needs constant protection, while White has no weaknesses.

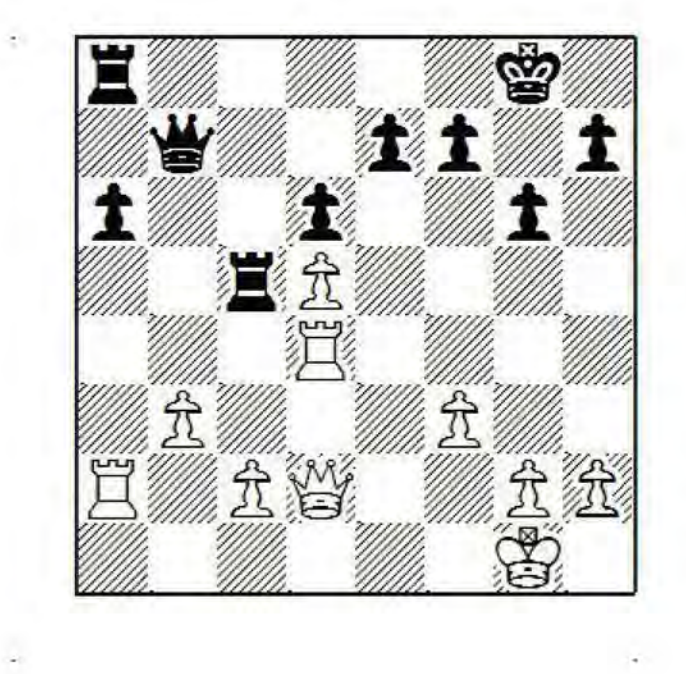
Answer: White does indeed have weaknesses, although they are a little less obvious. On the c-file, White can end up with issues if Black plays ... e7-e5 followed by doubling the rooks. Then the c-pawn will become a problem. If White wards off the c-file pressure by playing c2-c4, then the b3-pawn will be weak. Finally, if the dark-squared bishops get exchanged, then White's dark squares will be significantly weaker than Black's. Oh yes, there are weaknesses. However, you are right, the a6-pawn is weak and it does need protection at the moment.

In a game from the same year, Black prevented White's next move with 18 ... e6 19 Kh1 Rc6 20 Nd1 Rac8 21 Rb4 Qc7 22 c4 d5! and Black has excellent counterplay, S.Ganguly-G.Guseinov, Dubai 2011.

19 Nd5

White forces the minor pieces off the board, trusting that the departure of the minor pieces will weaken the black monarch. However, White also fixes his own pawns on the light squares, potentially setting up issues on the dark squares later on.

19 ... Nxd5 20 exd5 Bxd4+ 21 Rxd4 Rc5



Question: How should this position be evaluated?

Answer: I think it is fair to assess the position as 'about equal chances' as both have their weaknesses to consider.

22 Rd3

Initially my computer claims an advantage for White with 22 h3 intending 22 ... a5 23 Qh6 Rxd5 24 Rh4 but Black should be more or less okay after 24 ... e6 25 Qxh7+ Kf8 26 Raa4 Rf5 with an interesting heavy piece endgame.

22 ... Qc8

Black also has 22 ... a5! to answer 23 c4 with 23 ... a4! or 22 ... Qb6 followed by ... a5 to control the dark squares around White's queenside pawns. These options make more sense than the text move, which seems a little passive.

23 c4 Rb8

Black can consider activating the queen with 23 ... Qf5 24 g3 Rc7 25 Kg2 Rb7 potentially harassing White with annoying queen checks if he gets too aggressive when targeting the a- and e-pawns.

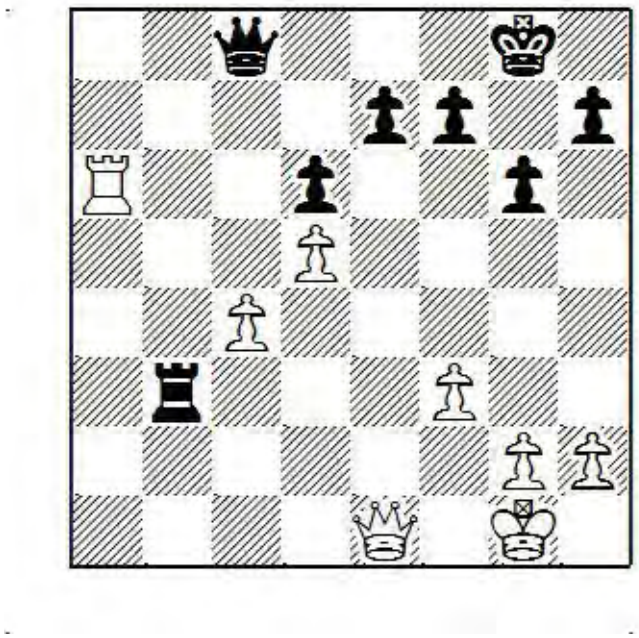
24 Re3

White wants to use the semi-open e-file to put pressure on the backward e-pawn.

24 ... Rc7 25 Qe1 Rcb7 26 Rxa6 Rxb3 27 Rxb3?!

27 Rc6! would make some level of sense, denying Black the opportunity to activate the queen. After 27 ... Qd8 28 Rxb3 Rxb3 29 h4 Qd7 30 Kh2, Black has at best a tiny pull and at worst he has nothing.

27 ... Rxb3



Question: This is beginning to look difficult for White. Is that a safe assumption?

Answer: Pretty safe. While this is far from being lost by force for White, it is not an easy defence. White is saddled with weak dark squares, weak c- and d-pawns and also a soft back rank. All these will allow Black to play on for a while without committing to anything decisive while waiting for White to make inaccuracies. In the game, these mistakes happen a lot sooner than Black could have hoped for.

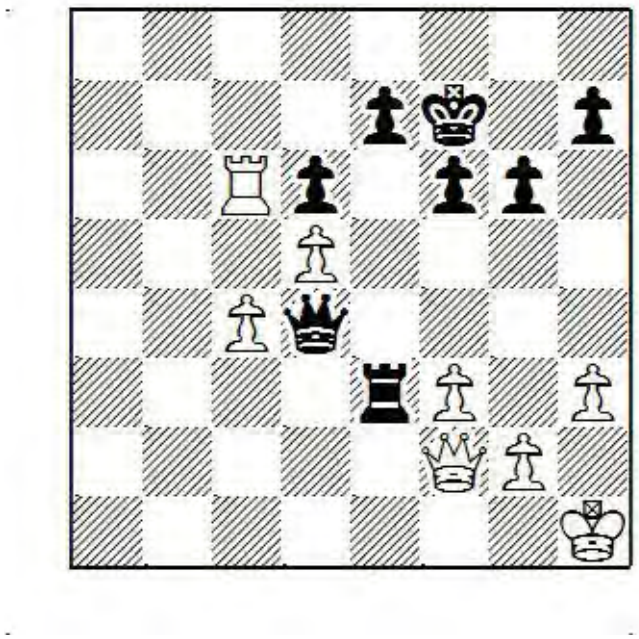
28 Qa1 Qc5+ 29 Kh1 f6

Giving the king the necessary luft.

30 Qe1 Re3 31 Qf2?! Kf7 32 Rc6?

White could have kept Black's advantage within limits with 32 Ra1 Qd4 33 Qg1 Qe5 (guarding the back rank). While the defence decidedly is uncomfortable, Black at least does not have an easy breakthrough like in the game. Tying the rook up on an inconsequential square like c6 makes no sense any longer when the Black queen is already centralised.

32 ... Qd4 33 h3



33 ... h5?!

This wins too. But the most accurate continuation is 33 ... Qd1+! 34 Kh2 Re2 35 Qh4 h5 36 Rc7 Qf1 37 Qg3 Re1 and it is game over.

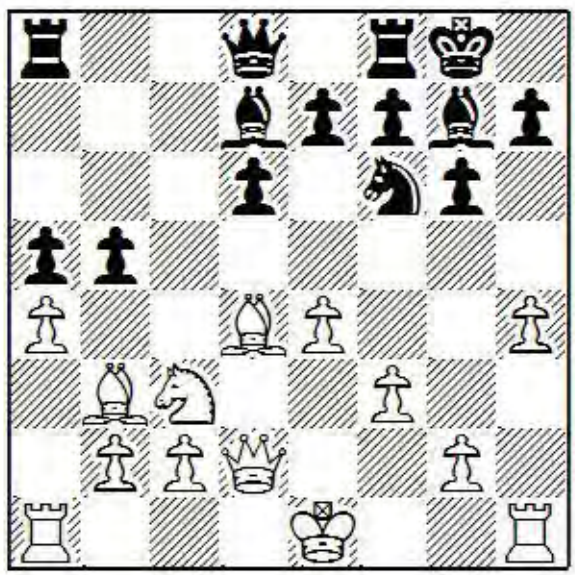
34 h4 g5 35 hxg5 fxg5 36 Qg3 h4 0-1

Game 71
S.Ter Sahakyan-T.Gharamian
Cappelle la Grande 2013

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5 12 h4

White carries on his kingside intentions immediately, and at least postpones the decision to jam Black's queenside expansion to the next move.

12 ... a5 13 a4



A more restrained continuation than 13 h5 which is covered in Game 72.

13 ... bxa4 14 Nxa4 h5!?

Black decides to pull the brake a little, restricting White's initiative on the kingside a bit. Several other moves have been tested at this juncture and the two most important ones are:

a) 14 ... e5 is playable but far less convincing for Black, for example 15 Bb6 Qb8 16 Be3 Be6 (the pawn sacrifice 16 ... d5!? is interesting and after 17 exd5 e4 18 0-0 exf3 19 Rxf3 Ng4 20 Bf4 Qb4, Black has some compensation) 17 Ra3 Qb4 18 Nb6 Rab8 19 Qxb4 axb4 20 Ra5 Rb7 (20 ... Bxb3 21 cxb3 Rfd8 22 Ke2 Nh5 23 Rc1 and White is clearly in control of the game with more active pieces, V.Topalov-S.Tiviakov, Wijk aan Zee 1996) 21 Ke2 Rfb8 22 Nd5 Nxd5 23 Bxd5 Bxd5 24 Rxd5 Bf8 25 Ra1 is at best fractionally better for White, L.Cernousek-J.Slaby, Litomysl 2007.

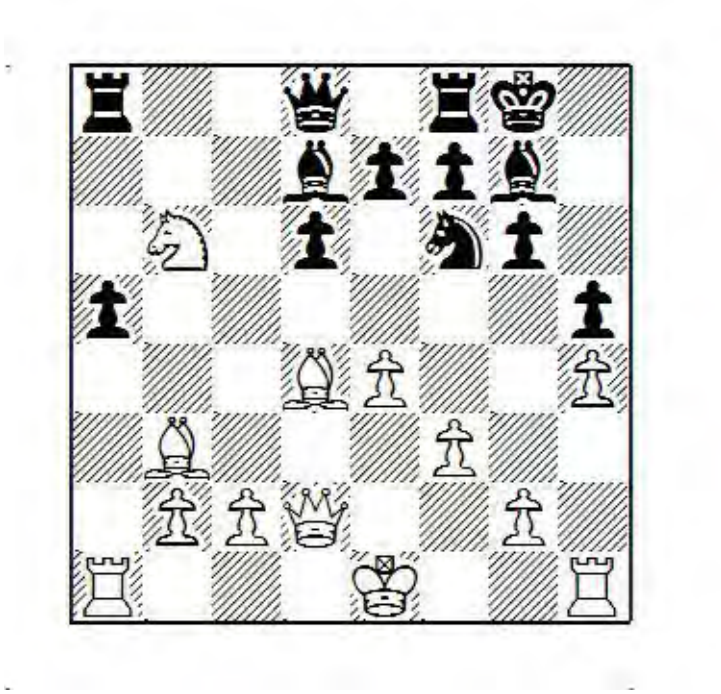
b) 14 ... Be6!? is the key alternative for Black. White has been unable to prove any kind of advantage. For instance:

b1) 15 Nb6 (on its way to the d5-square) 15 ... Ra6 16 Nd5 Bxd5 17 exd5 Qc7 18 Ra4 Rb8 19 h5!? (or 19 Kf2 h5 20 Re1 Ne8 21 Bxg7 Nxg7 22 g4 Qd8 23 Kg2 Ra7 24 Qe3 Rab7 25 Re4 Rb4 and Black has solved his opening problems successfully, A.Shirov-V.Topalov, Moscow 2001) 19 ... Nxh5 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 g4 Nf6 22 Qh6+ Kg8 23 Rf4 Qc5 (threatening ... Qe3+ as well as other moves, so White has to act resolutely) 24 Rxf6 exf6 25 Kd1 Rxb3 26 cxb3 Qxd5+ 27 Kc2 Rc6+ 28 Kb1 Qd3+ 29 Ka2 g5 30 Qxf6 Qg6, and while Black has an extra pawn, White has decent drawing chances, A.Shirov-V.Ivanchuk, Wijk aan Zee 1999.

b2) 15 Bxe6 seems to play into Black's hands as after 15 ... fxe6 16 h5 (or 16 b3 Qc7 17 Qc3?! Qb7 18 Qc4?! d5 19 Qe2 dxe4 20 0-0-0 Rac8 21 Kb1 which was seen in E.Berg-B.Macieja, Oslo 2009, and now 21 ... Rc6 22 Rhe1 Rfc8 would have guaranteed Black a solid advantage so White should have castled on move 17 or 18 to lessen Black's edge) 16 ... Nxh5 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 0-0-0 Qe8 19 Nb6 Rb8!

20 Qxa5 Qc6 21 Na4 e5 22 Nc3 and now instead of 22 ... Nf4 as playing in S.Ter Sahakyan-P.Tregubov, Rijeka 2010, Black should have played 22 ... Rfc8 with very dangerous pressure along the semi-open b- and c-files.

15 Nb6



Question: Yes, this Nb6-d5 knight manoeuvre is seen in the previous note, but as in that game, forcing the resulting pawn structure didn't look that great, right?

Answer: You are right, in the previous note, it did not work out all that well for White, but that was not solely due to the pawn structure, and the same should be said for this position. Other factors play in. Black has weakened his kingside to pawn attacks after having played ... h7-h5. Black has serious issues to contend with on that flank, having to contend with g2-g4 pawn hits.

It is likely that the white king will be happier on the kingside, rather than facing heavy artillery on the queenside. However, Black is fine after 15 0-0!? Bb5 16 Rfd1 Nd7 17 Nc3 Bxd4+ 18 Qxd4 Bc6 19 Ba4 Bxa4 20 Rxa4 Nb6 21 Ra3 Qc7 22 Rb3 Rfb8 with equality, S.Fedorchuk-A.David, Evry 2009.

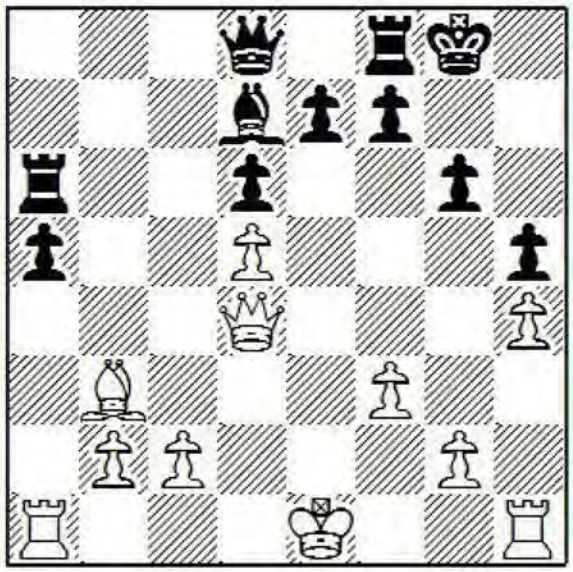
15 ... Ra6 16 Nd5

In a very top flight encounter, albeit in blitz, White tried 16 Nxd7, but even so after 16 ... Nxd7 17 Bc4 Ra8 18 Bd5 Bxd4 19 Qxd4 Rb8! 20 b3 Qc7 21 0-0, I.Nepomniachtchi-A.Grischuk, Sochi (blitz) 2014, Black could have secured a comfortable edge with 21 ... Rfc8 22 Rfd1 Rb4 23 Qd2 Qc5+ and Black is clearly in control.

16 ... Nxd5 17 exd5

The other recapture 17 Bxd5 is met by 17 ... Bxd4 18 Qxd4 Qc7 19 0-0 Rb8 20 Rf2 a4 and Black is just a tad better.

17 ... Bxd4 18 Qxd4



Question: White's bishop looks weaker than Black's, but Black's pawns on a5 and e7 seem weak. So how should this position be evaluated?

Answer: A reasonable evaluation is once again about equal. Black's a5- and e7-pawns are definitely targets, but Black can potentially push his pawn forward and White's h-pawn could also be weak in the long-term.

18 ... a4!?

Very logical, kicking the bishop by pushing the pawn to a square where it is protected by its own bishop while exposing the b2-pawn as a weakness. Nevertheless, the more challenging move is 18 ... Rb6! 19 Kf2 (19 0-0-0? does not work here on account of 19 ... Qb8! followed by ... Rc8, ... Rb4 and ... a5-a4, and White is toast) 19 ... Qc7 20 Qc3 Qxc3 21 bxc3 Ra8 22 Rhe1 Kf8 and Black most definitely has the better chances in the endgame.

19 Bc4 Qb6 20 0-0-0!

The best way for White to get the rest of his pieces developed while guarding everything and not handing Black a bigger lead in development.

20 ... Bb5 21 Qxb6 Rxb6 22 Ba2 Rfb8

Targeting the weakest spot in White's camp, the b2-pawn. The alternative is 22 ... Rc8 23 Rd4 Bd7 24 Re1 Kf8 and chances are about even.

23 Rhe1 Bd7

Black can also consider 23 ... Kf8 to prevent White from capturing the e-pawn and after 24 Rd4 Bd7, but 25 b3 axb3 26 Bxb3 Rb4 27 Ree4, the game looks very drawish.

24 Rxe7 Bf5 25 Rd2 ½-½

Here the players agreed to a draw, which perhaps is not entirely unreasonable, although only Black can be better after 25 Rd2 Rxb2 26 Re8+ Rxe8 27 Kxb2 Re1 28 Bc4 Bd7 and Black's position clearly hold the more potential. Alternatively, White could have considered 25 g4 Rxb2 (25 ... Bxc2 26 Rd2 Bb3 27 Bxb3 Rxb3 28 Rd7 R8b6 29 gxh5 gxh5 30 Rg2+ does not provide Black any realistic winning chances) 26 gxf5 Rxa2 27 fxg6 Ra1+ 28 Kd2 Rxd1+ 29 Kxd1 fxg6 30 Re4 Ra8 31 Kc1 Ra5 32 c4 a3 and a draw is the likely result.

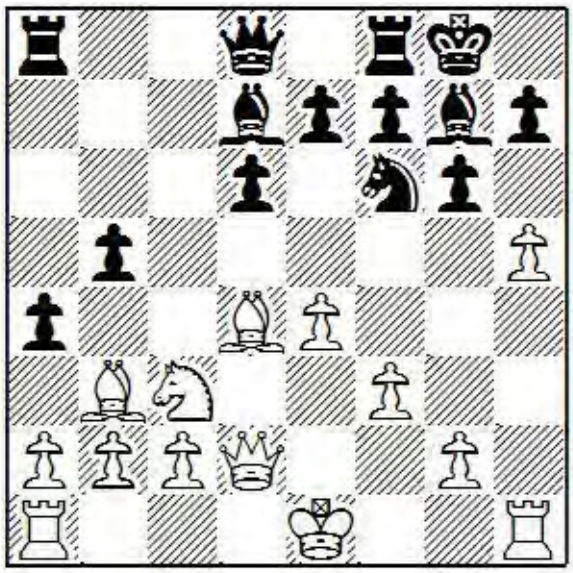
In any case, it could not have hurt Black to play on for a while longer.

Game 72
J.Cuartas-K.Grigoryan
Barcelona 2014

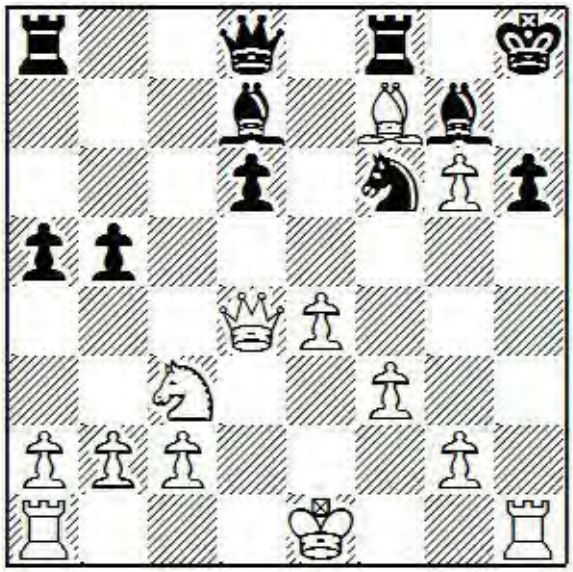
1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Bb3 d6 9 f3 Bd7 10 Qd2 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5 12 h4 a5 13 h5

This time, White goes for blood and this virtually relinquishes the bishop pair in return for Black's compromised pawn structure.

13 ... a4



Black should stay away from 13 ... e5 which is considered risky and seems entirely unnecessary. However, White has to respond forcefully to take advantage with 14 hxg6! exd4 (14 ... hxg6?! 15 Be3 b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 Bxd5 is just really ugly for Black) 15 Bxf7+ Kh8 16 Qxd4 h6.



Now, White has a decisive hit on the h6-pawn with 17 Qe3! Ng8 18 g4 b4 (18 ... Be8 19 g5 Bxf7 20 gxh6 Bxg6 21 hxg7+ Kxg7 22 Nd5 Rf7 23 Kd2 Kf8 24 Rag1 Bh7 25 Qd4 and Black had to resign here, J.Tejo-J.Makarczuk, correspondence 2003) 19 Nd5 Be8 20 g5 Bxf7 21 gxf7 Rxf7 22 0-0-0 Qf8 23 f4 Re8 24 gxh6 Bxh6 25 Rdg1 Ne7 26 Qa7 Kh7 27 Qd7 Ng8 28 Qh3 and Black resigned, clearly tired of seeing White steadily improve her position without being able to do anything himself, O.Rause-O.Ekebjerg, correspondence 2002.

14 Bd5

In a recent game, White tried 14 Bxf6 exf6 (14 ... Bxf6?? is of course not an option due to 15 hxg6 and

Black cannot recapture the pawn) 15 Bd5 was T.Kulhanek-M.Jirovsky, Turnov 2014, and now 15 ... Rc8 16 hxg6 hxg6 17 0-0-0 b4 18 Ne2 f5 would provide mutual chances.

14 ... b4

Black has tried 14 ... e5 on several occasions, but White is probably better after 15 h6 Bxh6 (the retreat 15 ... Bh8?! does not work as after 16 Bxa8 exd4 17 Nd5 Re8 18 Nxf6+ Qxf6 19 Bd5, White has a very clear advantage, V.Bologan-D.Moldovan, Vandoeuvre 2005) 16 Qxh6 exd4 17 e5 Re8 18 0-0-0 Rxe5 19 Rxd4 Rc8 20 Ne4 Bf5 and now White has 21 Bxf7+! Kxf7 22 Rxd6, V.Bologan-S.Maze, Evry 2008. Now, Black should have defended himself with 22 ... Qe7 23 Rxf6+ Kg8 24 Rd6 Bxe4 25 fxe4 Qg5+ 26 Qxg5 Rxg5, leaving him a pawn down, but with decent chances to hold the game.

15 hxg6 hxg6 16 Bxf6

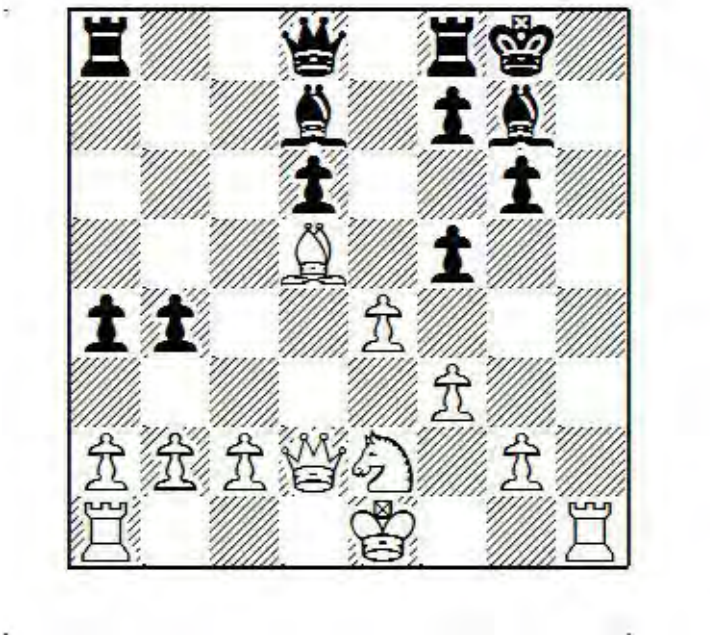
In another recent game, White retreated the knight with 16 Ne2?! which allowed Black to grab the initiative after 16 ... e5 17 Be3 Nxd5 18 exd5 Re8 19 Bh6?! Bf6 20 Ng3 e4 21 0-0 a3 22 Nxe4 Rxe4 23 fxe4 axb2 24 Rab1 Bc3 25 Qf4 Qe8 and Black won without too much trouble, V.Kovalev-A.Shirov, Riga 2014.

16 ... exf6

Question: This looks terrible for Black, doesn't it? His position is structurally compromised and White has the open h-file as well as a superb light-squared bishop. Has Black's strategy failed already?

Answer: Easy now, tiger! Nope, it has not failed. On the contrary, it is very complex and Black's counterplay will be evident soon enough.

17 Ne2 f5!?



Question: So now we are sacrificing an exchange?

Answer: Yes, we are. Don't forget that the White king is still stuck in the centre and castling queenside is decidedly unpalatable. Black's queenside pawns are already at the doorstep and his Dragon bishop is locked and loaded.

18 exf5

Let's look at other possibilities:

a) Taking the exchange immediately of course deserves a look. After 18 Bxa8 Qxa8 19 Qxd6 Bb5 20 Rd1!? (or 20 Nf4 Rd8 21 Qb6 fxe4 22 Nxg6 exf3 23 Ne7+ Kf8 24 gxf3 Bxb2 25 Nf5, R.Mamedov-G.Guseinov, Shamkir 2014, and now 25 ... Bc3+ leads to a long fun line that ends in draw, courtesy of my engine showing 26 Kf2 Rd2+ 27 Kg3 Be5+ 28 Kg4 Rg2+ 29 Kh4 f6 30 Qxb5 Qxf3 31 Qc5+ Kf7 32

Qe7+ Kg6 33 Qe8+ Kxf5 34 Qc8+ Kg6 35 Qg8+ with a draw by repetition) 20 ... Bxe2 21 Kxe2 fxe4 22 Rh4 exf3+ 23 gxf3 Re8+ 24 Kf2 Bxb2 25 Qxb4 Qa7+ 26 Rdd4 Rb8 27 Qxa4 Bxd4+ 28 Qxd4 Qxd4+ 29 Rxd4 Rb2, a drawn rook ending was reached, A.Gabrielian-E.Vorobiov, Kazan 2013.

b) Declining the exchange with 18 Qxb4 isn't very promising either as after 18 ... a3 19 c3 (or 19 Bxa8 Qxa8 20 Rb1 axb2 21 Rxb2 fxe4 22 fxe4, A.Gonzalez Pruneda-C.Mate Adan, Cala Mendia 2001, and here 22 ... Bc6 23 c3 Bxe4 leaves Black with plenty of compensation for the exchange) 19 ... axb2 20 Qxb2 Rc8, D. Stellwagen-S.Tiviakov, Hilversum 2007, Black's active pieces and White's very flawed pawn structure promise Black excellent compensation for the exchange. Black is only a pawn down and with his active pieces and clear targets for attack, he has more than sufficient compensation. White must play carefully in order to keep the balance.

18 ... Bxf5 19 Nd4

A look at the alternatives:

a) White should stay away from the unmotivated 19 g4 which is quite weakening. For instance, after 19 ... Be6 20 Bxa8 Qxa8 21 Kf2 Rc8!? 22 a3?! Bxb2 23 axb4 Qa7+ 24 Kg2 Bc4 25 Ng3 a3 26 c3 Bxc3 27 Qxd6 as played in J.Moreno Carnero-O.Korneev, Port Erin 2003, now 27 ... Bxa1 28 Rxa1 Qe3 (threatening ... a3-a2 and ... Be2) puts White in some trouble.

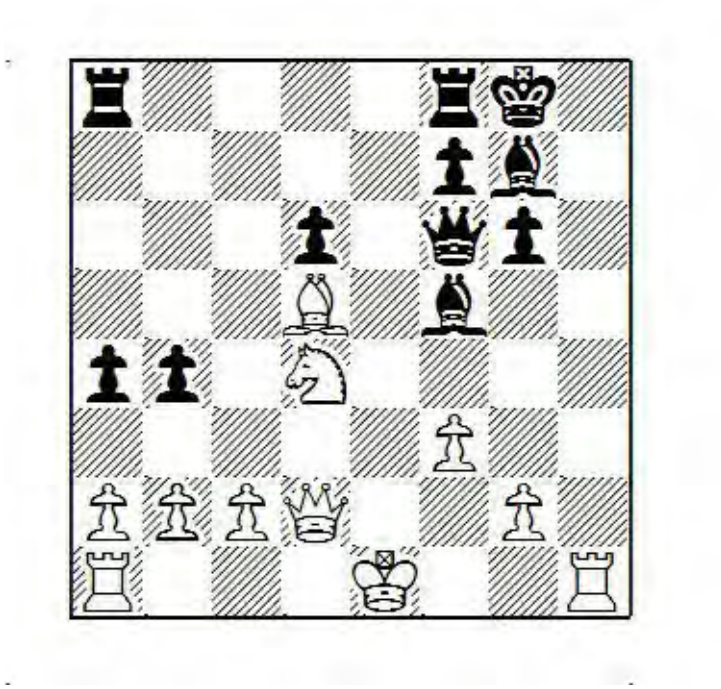
b) However, 19 Bxa8 is a problem for Black as after 19 ... Qxa8 20 Rd1, we have:

b1) 20 ... Re8 21 Qxb4 Bxc2 V.Iordachescu-B.Chatalbashev, Jakarta 2012, and now 22 Rxd6 would be best, leaving Black with some but not full compensation for the exchange.

b2) 20 ... Rc8 21 Qxb4 Rxc2 22 Rd2 Rxd2 23 Qxd2 Be6 and here Black decided to resign in Yu Yangyi-Bu Xiangzhi, Sharjah 2014, clearly not expecting to get any chances to fight on.

b3) An untested idea is 20 ... Qb7 21 Rh4 Rb8 22 Qxd6 Bxc2 with a complicated game.

19 ... Qf6!?

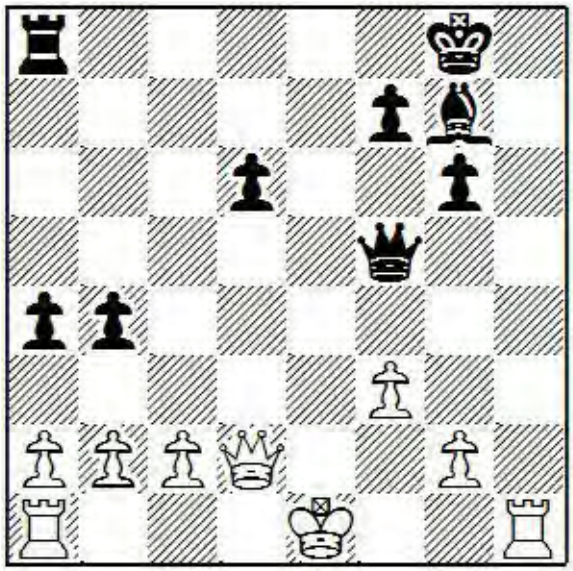


Question: Why is Black not worried about the a8-rook?

Answer: Black is not concerned about losing the exchange as White's chronically weakened dark squares more than make up for this sacrifice.

My computer suggests 19 ... Ra5!? 20 Nc6 Qc7 21 Nxa5 Bxb2! with an enduring initiative.

20 Nxf5 Qxf5 21 Bxa8 Rxa8



22 0-0?

Clearly White is uncomfortable with his king being stuck in the centre. However, White puts it somewhere even less safe! The ballsy 22 Qxb4 would have been best, after say 22 ... a3 (White also survives after 22 ... Qxc2 23 Qe4 Rc8 24 Qxc2 Rxc2 25 Rd1 Rxb2 26 Rh4 and White is out of trouble) 23 0-0-0! Bxb2+ 24 Kb1 Bg7 25 Rxd6 Qe5 26 c3 and now 26 ... Bf8 is met by 27 Rxg6+!! fxg6 28 Qb3+ Kg7 29 Qb7+ Be7 30 Qxa8 Qb5+ 31 Kc2 Qe2+ 32 Kb3 Qb5+ with a draw.

22 ... Qc5+ 23 Kh1 Bxb2

Black could also consider 23 ... a3!? 24 bxa3 Bxa1 25 Rxa1 Kg7 26 g3 Rxa3 when despite the material equality, Black is on the verge of winning with threats such as ... Rc3 and ... Rxf3.

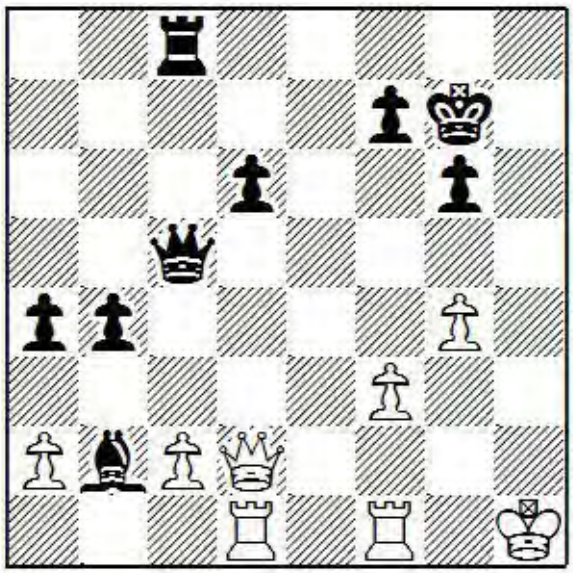
24 Rad1 Kg7

Threatening ... Rh8 with mate!

25 g4?!

I'm not sure why White felt it was necessary to kill himself on the dark squares in this fashion. 25 g3 made more sense, even if Black is still better.

25 ... Rc8



26 Rf2?

It seems logical to defend the pawn, but instead of losing the pawn he ends up with a very passive position, compromised by the weak dark squares around his king. White should have opted for 26 Kg2, getting the king out of the h-file and ready for the defence. One line runs 26 ... Qxc2 27 Rf2 Qxd2 28 Rdxd2 a3 29 Rxb2 axb2 30 Rxb2 Rc4 with an extra pawn for Black, but decent saving chances for White.

26 ... Bc3!

Now, Black's attack accelerates further and the dark squares have become White's nightmare. Black could not play this move if White had played 26 Kg2 because the rook would be guarded and White could then play 27 Qxd6.

27 Qe2 Re8 28 Qf1

After 28 Qxe8 Qxf2, Black wins with 29 Qc6 Be5.

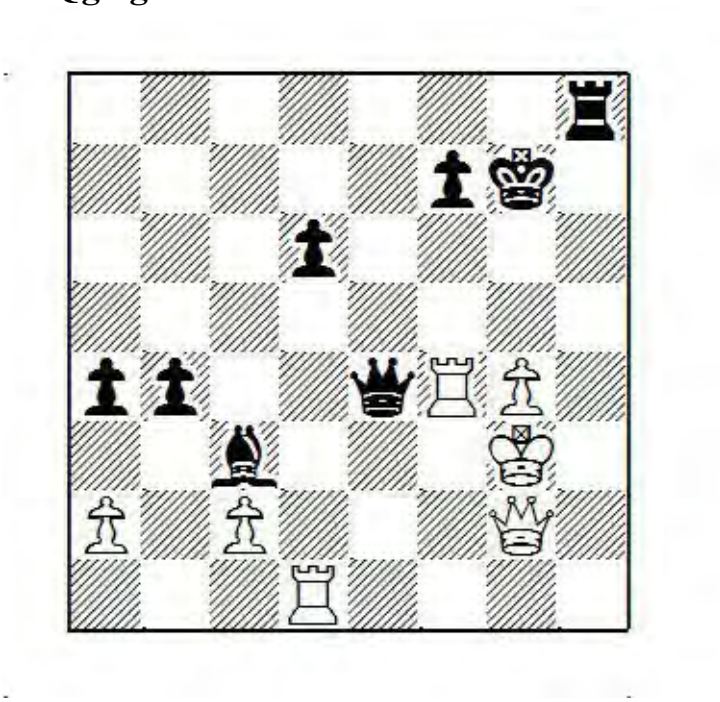
28 ... Rh8+ 29 Kg2 Qe5!?

Penetrating on the dark squares with 29 ... Bd4!? 30 Re2 Be3 also looks very tempting.

30 f4 Qe4+ 31 Kg3 g5!?

Black decides to break open the dark squares with a crowbar. But the elegant poking with 31 ... Bf6! 32 g5 Bd4 is even more efficient as 33 Rf3 Qxc2 34 Kg4 Bc3 followed by ... Qxa2 wins easily for Black.

32 Qg2 gxf4+ 33 Rxf4



33 ... Qe6?!

It is possible to win the exchange with 33 ... Be1+ 34 Rxe1 Qxe1+, but Black is looking for more than just a much better endgame that would arise after 35 Qf2 Qxf2+ 36 Rxf2 Rh1.

34 Qd5! Be5 35 Qxe6 fxe6 36 Kf3 Bxf4 37 Kxf4 Rd8

Black got the endgame anyway, but with a smaller advantage than was available to him earlier.

38 Ke3?

From what I can see, this move just loses without much of a fight. Instead White should have played the more active defence 38 Rb1 Rb8 39 Ke4 and Black still has some work to do.

38 ... Rc8 39 Rxd6 Rxc2 40 Rd4 Rxa2 41 Rxb4 a3 42 Ra4 Ra1

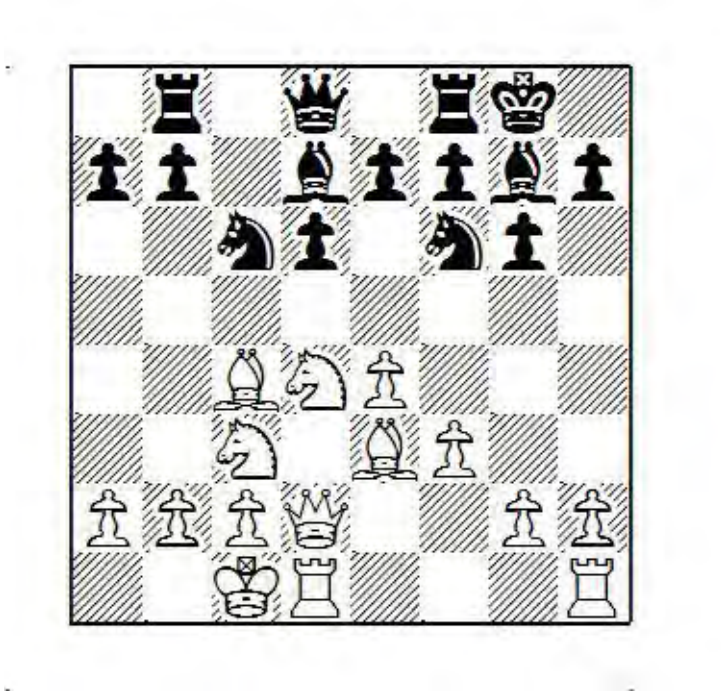
Now it is easy to calculate the remaining moves.

43 Kd2 a2 44 Kc2 Rf1 45 Kb2 a1Q+ 46 Rxa1 Rxa1 47 Kxa1 Kf6 48 Kb2 Kg5 49 Kc3 Kxg4 50 Kd4 Kf4 0-1

Black has the opposition, and of course wins easily.

Chapter Fifteen
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: The Chinese Dragon – 10…Rb8

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rb8



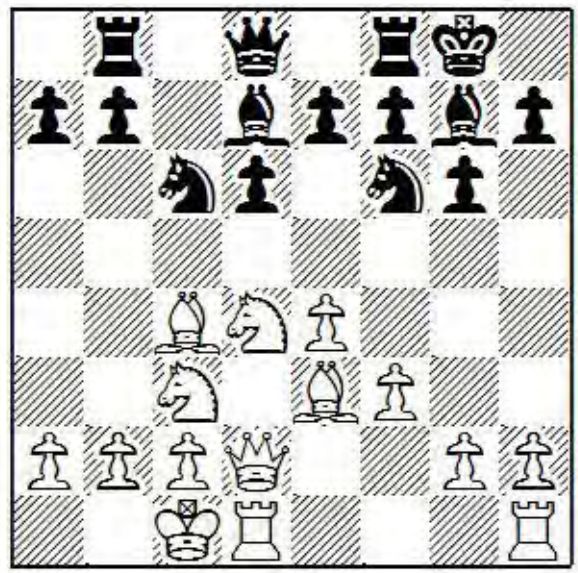
The Chinese Dragon is one of the most recent developments or discoveries in the entire Dragon Variation. The first time I came across it was when I read a survey about it in *New In Chess Yearbook 62,* where the coverage was sketchy, but with a bunch of original analysis, largely because there was very little game material to work with. I must admit I was very sceptical of the entire thing, even when an acquaintance of mine, German IM Florian Grafl sent me his private analysis of the line. However, my scepticism has been proven completely wrong and its fans have been vindicated. While the line has been developed a great deal and the understanding of it has been expanded accordingly, there is still plenty of scope for individual discoveries.

In Game 73 we see the future world champion Carlsen test the not entirely logical 11 Bb3 followed by 12 Kb1, apparently lining the king up against the opposing rook. The very aggressive 12 h4, seeking to immediately launch an attack against Black's king in response to Black's queenside activities, brings about very complicated play in Game 74. Finally, the main line in this variation, 12 Bh6 is tested in Game 75, where Carlsen this time demonstrates impressive handling of the black pieces.

Game 73
M.Carlsen-T.Radjabov
Bilbao 2008

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rb8!?

Black prepares the ... b7-b5 pawn thrust. The b8-rook also come in handy when Black plays ... Na5-c4 supported by the b5-pawn and White captures the knight allowing the rook to come into play. Sometimes the rook is also lifted to the b6-square where it assists the queenside assault with ... Ra6.



11 Bb3 Na5 12 Kb1

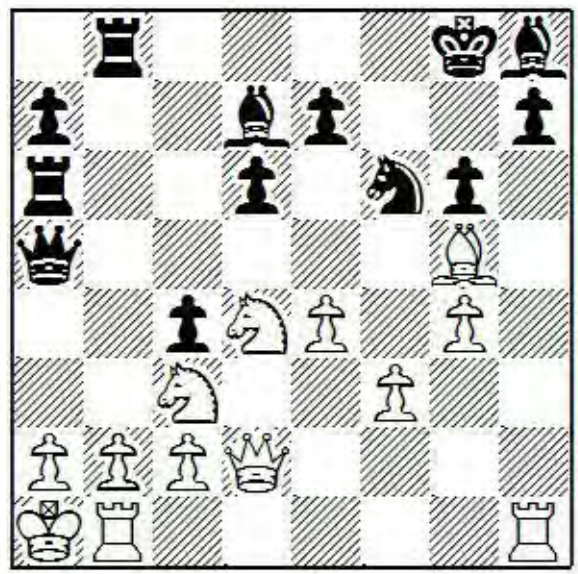
Question: This looks like a contradictory plan to what White should aiming for. Why place the king on the file where Black just put his rook? Moreover, wouldn't that file be opened after Black plays ... b7-b5 followed by ... Nc4?

Answer: Well, (while I certainly do not like this idea for White) he intends to crawl into the corner with the king and then play Rb1, apparently holding the fort while afterwards and then concentrate on the attack on the kingside. It is a slow plan and not a very convincing one, but for some reason Carlsen decided to give it a run.

12 ... b5 13 h4

Also leading to similar lines is 13 g4, except it is even slower. Now, 13 ... Nc4 (13 ... Nxb3!? looks like an improved version of the lines we will examine in the next chapter) 14 Bxc4 bxc4 15 Ka1, let's look at the following:

a) 15 ... Re8!? 16 h4 Qa5 (16 ... h5 17 g5 Nh7 is provocative, but probably perfectly playable) 17 Rb1 Rb6 18 h5 Reb8 19 Bh6 Bh8 20 Bg5 Ra6 21 hxg6 fxg6 and White is under severe major piece bombardment.



White went down quickly after 22 Nde2? (22 a3 with the idea of defending the a- and b-pawns with an eventual Qc1 runs into 22 ... Be6! and White has to be extremely careful as 23 Nxe6?? loses to 23 ...

Nxe4! with imminent mate on the a-file and 23 Be3? gets hit by 23 ... Bxg4! winning a clean pawn with the same ... Nxe4 motif) 22 ... Rb4 23 Nc1 Be6 24 e5? Nd5 25 f4 dxe5 26 f5 e4 27 f6 exf6 28 Qh2 h5 29 gxh5 Nxc3 30 bxc3 fxg5 and White resigned in K.Szabo-V.Jianu, Baia Sprie 2012.

b) Black normally stays away from 15 ... Qa5 on account of 16 Nd5 Nxd5 (16 ... Qd8 is playable as well) 17 Qxa5 Nxe3 18 Qc3 Nxd1 19 Rxd1 Rfc8 with a fascinating position. Black only has a rook and a bishop for the queen, but he has the bishop pair, F.Nijboer-M.Leon Hoyos, Metz 2010. However, I don't see how Black can ever be better in this position, so I will recommend that Black stays away from this option.

13 ... Nc4 14 Bxc4 bxc4 15 Ka1

White is following the manuscript given above.

15 ... h5!?

Similar to the Soltis Variation which we looked at in Chapter 11 where Black tries to restrain White on the kingside. Obviously it does invite White to play g2-g4 at some point, instantly making full-contact with Black's pawn shield. A fully playable alternative is 15 ... Qb6 16 Rb1 Qa5!? (S.Ter Sahakyan-D.Dvirnyy, Chotowa 2010, saw Black playing wonderfully provocative chess successfully with 16 ... Qa6 17 Bh6 e5 18 Nde2 Be6 19 h5 Rb6 20 g4 Qb7 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 Ng3 Rb8 23 Qc1 Kf8, intending to put the king on e7 where it is in relative safety, leaving Black time to steadily improve his position and queenside attack) 17 Bh6 Bxh6! 18 Qxh6, D.Swiercz-I.Chirila, Pardubice 2009, and now 18 ... Qe5 19 Rhd1 Rfc8 20 g4 e6 21 Nde2 Rb6 looks quite playable for Black.

16 Rb1

The sharper 16 g4 is also possible and now 16 ... Qb6 17 Rb1 Qa5 18 gxh5 Nxh5 19 Rhg1 Rfc8 20 Rg5 Rc5 21 Rxc5 dxc5 22 Nde2 Bc6 leaves Black with a comfortable position, D.Sharma-D.Kanovsky, Olomouc 2010.

16 ... Qa5

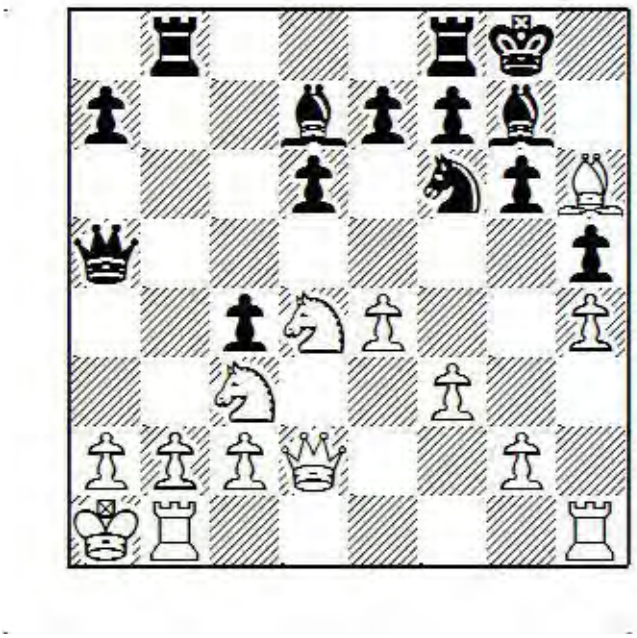
With White's attack looking rather anaemic, Black has time to fine-tune his approach. For example, 16 ... Re8 looks reasonable after 17 Bh6 Bh8 18 g4 hxg4 19 h5 Qa5! 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 Rh4 gxf3 22 Nxf3 as played in Z.Efimenko-P.Charbonneau, Montreal 2005, and now 22 ... Ng4 23 Qd5+ Qxd5 24 Nxd5 Bf6 would have left Black a pawn up.

17 Bh6

None of White's options at this juncture inspire particular confidence. Two alternatives here are:

a) 17 Bg5 Rb6 18 Rhg1 Rfb8 Black's play is simple and straightforward. However, now White jumps off in the deep end without his wings with 19 g4? hxg4 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 fxg4 Rxb2!? 22 Rxb2 Rxb2 23 Kxb2 Qb6+ 24 Ncb5, S.Khanin-J.Geller, Samara 2013, and here the simplest would be 24 ... Qxb5+ 25 Kc1 c3 26 Nxb5 cxd2+ 27 Kxd2 Bxb5 and Black should win.

b) 17 Nde2 is decided more solid, but hardly a threat to Black. For instance, after 17 ... Rfc8 18 Rhd1 Rb4 19 a3 Rcb8 20 Bd4 R4b7 21 Qe1 Bc6, Black is doing quite well, K.Kulaots-G.Papp, Budapest 2008.



17 ... Bxh6!

It seems strange to drag the queen near the black king with this exchange for Black but it does diver White's queen from its other obligations, in this case, the defence of the queenside.

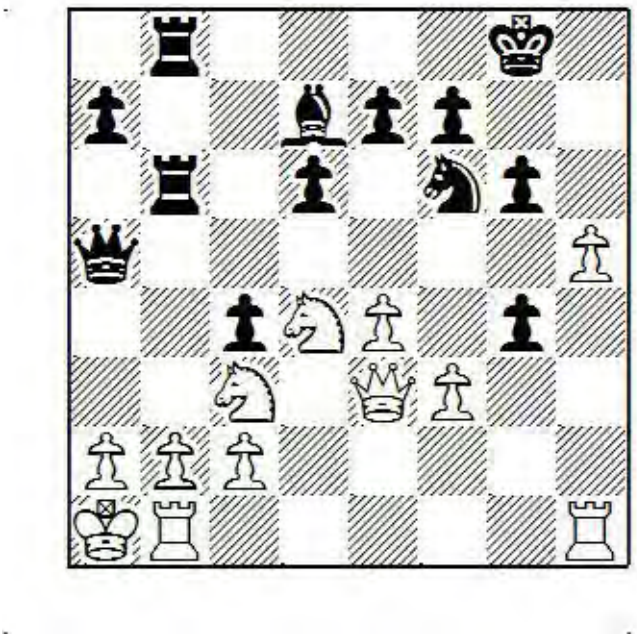
18 Qxh6 Rb6

Black continues with his pre-programmed flight plan, but 18 ... Rfc8 with a sneaky idea in mind is at least as good. For example, after 19 g4? (19 a3 Qb6 20 Nde2 Rc5 is absolutely fine for Black) 19 ... Rxb2! 20 Kxb2 Qb4+ 21 Kc1 Qxc3, Black is winning, R.Ramnath Bhuvanesh-N.Navalgund, Chennai 2010.

19 g4

Or 19 Qd2 Rfb8 20 Rhe1 Ra6 21 Re3 e5 22 Nde2 Be6 23 Nc1 Nd7 24 Qe1 Nc5 and White's position is absolutely depressing, M.Mrdja-I.Armanda, Zagreb 2010.

19 ... hxg4 20 Qe3 Rfb8 21 h5



Exercise: White is poised to prise open a path towards the black king. How should Black deal with this?

Answer: **21 ... g5!**

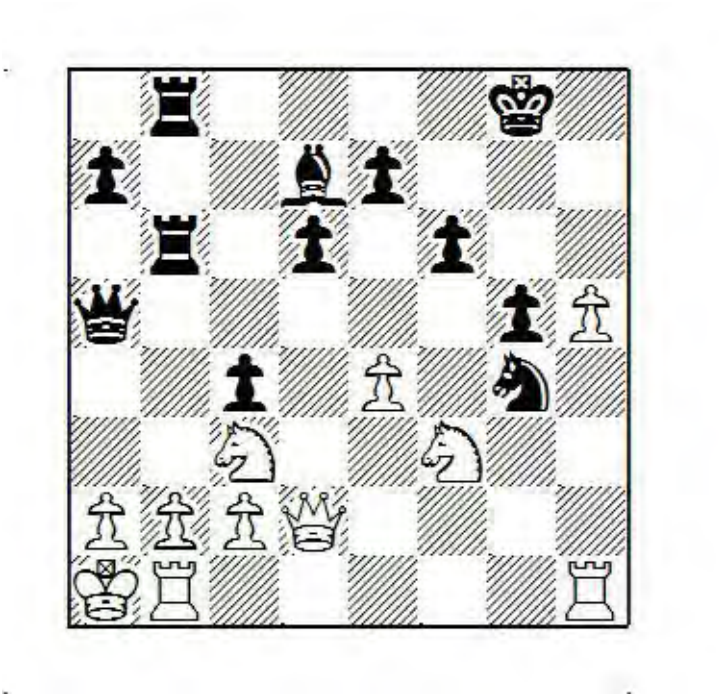
An elegant solution to dealing with White kingside attack, Black simply tries to close everything up, nullifying White's assault to a great degree.

Another, fully acceptable, idea is 21 ... Nxh5, for example 22 Nf5 gxf5 23 exf5 Qxf5 24 fxg4 Qe5 25 Qxe5 dxe5 26 Rxh5 Kf8 27 Rxe5 Bxg4 and Black has good chances to win this pawn-up ending.

22 fxg4 Nxg4 23 Qd2 f6

Very nice! Black's play is akin to NBA basketball superstar Hakeem 'The Dream' Olajuwon wagging his finger in White's face, while yelling "Not in my house!" The white attack comes to a sudden halt, and therefore he has to start getting creative before Black gets time to consolidate. Luckily for White, Black soon starts to drift.

24 Nf3!?



White stirs the pot a bit, entertaining ideas such as e4-e5, possibly followed by Nxg5, trying to open up the kingside again.

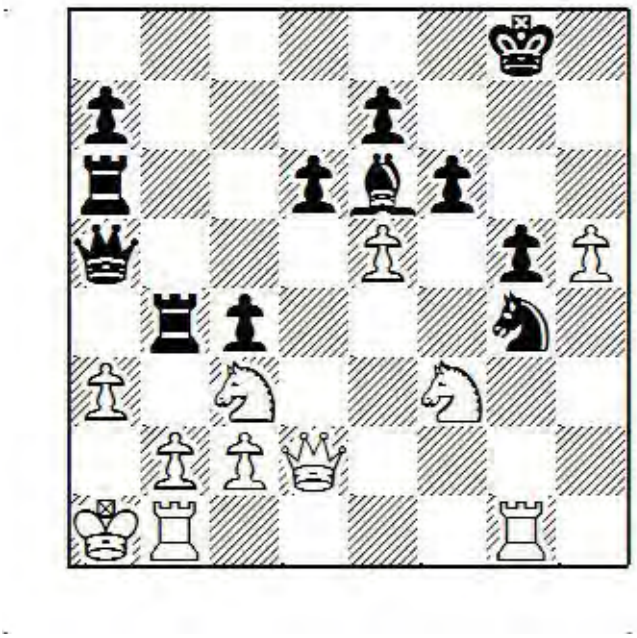
24 ... Ra6?!

This looks optically good but as long as the Nc3 cannot be evicted, Black's a-file battery is biting granite. The black king can tuck itself behind the white h-pawn with 24 ... Kh7 or 24 ... Kh8 followed by preparing the a-pawn's advance with ... Qc5.

25 Rhg1 Rb4 26 a3 Be6?!

Black can still keep things reasonably under control with 26 ... Rb7!? and allow White to open the e-file after 27 e5 Qc5! 28 exf6 exf6 29 Rge1 Kh8 30 Re7 d5 31 Qe1 Qd6 where Black should be able to fight off White's initiative and finally start to consolidate. However, to allow the e5-break and give White the open e-file seems very counter-intuitive.

27 e5!



27 ... dxe5?!

This is exactly the response Carlsen hoped to provoke. Now the solid kingside barrier Radjabov has erected gets breached.

Note that Black cannot play 27 ... Qxa3+ 28 bxa3 Rxa3+ 29 Na2 c3 on account of 30 Qxg5+! fxg5 31 Rxb4 and White is winning. Instead 27 ... Kh8 keeps the balance, for example 28 exf6 exf6 29 h6 Rb7 30 Qd4 Ne5 reaches a complicated position with chances to both sides.

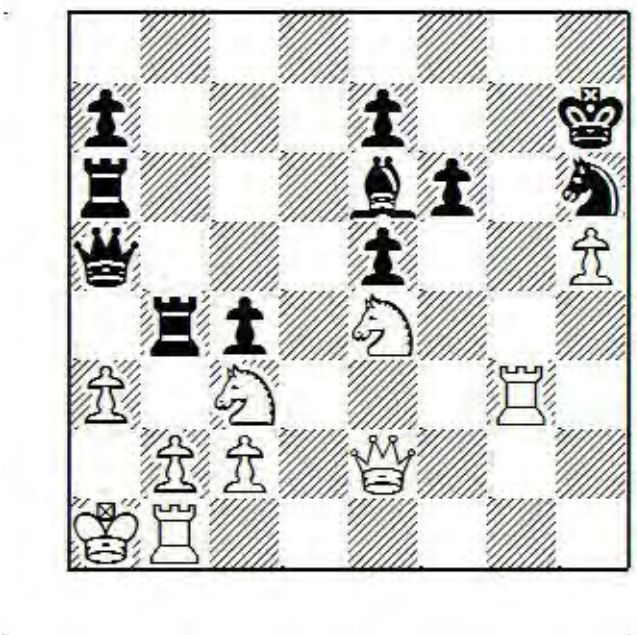
28 Nxg5! Bf5

Black cannot take the knight as after 28 ... fxg5 29 Qxg5+ Kf8 30 h6, it is game over.

29 Nge4 Kh7! 30 Qe2

Now White plays a little sloppily. After 30 Rg3 Rb8 31 Qg2, White maintains control of the game.

30 ... Nh6 31 Rg3 Be6??



A dreadful mistake that makes absolutely no sense at all. Why does Black allow White to play Rg6? Instead, after 31 ... Rb8! 32 Qg2 Kh8, Black should be able to defend.

32 Rg6?!

Logical and straight-forward, but not best. However, I suspect Black was in maddening time trouble at this point by the look of his moves. While the text move does win, White should have played 32 Qg2!

(threatening Rg7+ and Qg6) 32 ... Nf5 33 Rg7+ Nxg7 34 Qg6+ Kh8 35 Qh6+ Kg8 36 Rg1 and it is game over.

32 ... Nf5?

This pretty much ends the resistance, whereas 32 ... Bf5 has been suggested as keeping Black in the game. However, that is hardly the case. White wins with 33 Qd2! Bxg6 (or 33 ... Ng4 34 Ng5+ fxg5 35 Qxg5 Bxg6 36 Qxe7+ Kh8 37 hxg6 Rxg6 38 Qf8+ Kh7 39 Qf7+ Rg7 40 Qf5+ Rg6 41 Ne4 Rb7 42 Rh1+ Nh6 43 Nf6+ Kg7 44 Ne8+ Kh7 45 Qe4, threatening Rxh6+) 34 hxg6+ Kxg6 35 Rg1+ Kf7 36 Qxh6 Rxb2 37 Qg7+ Ke6 38 Qg8+ Kd7 39 Rd1+ Rd6 40 Rxd6+ exd6 41 Kxb2 and White wins easily.

33 Qg4 Nh4 34 Ng5+ fxg5 35 Qxg5 Nxg6 36 Qxg6+ Kh8 37 Rg1 1-0

Facing unavoidable mate, Black resigned.

Game 74
K.Szabo-M.Perunovic
Sarajevo 2011

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rb8 11 Bb3 Na5 12 h4

An aggressive and quite dangerous approach for Black to meet.

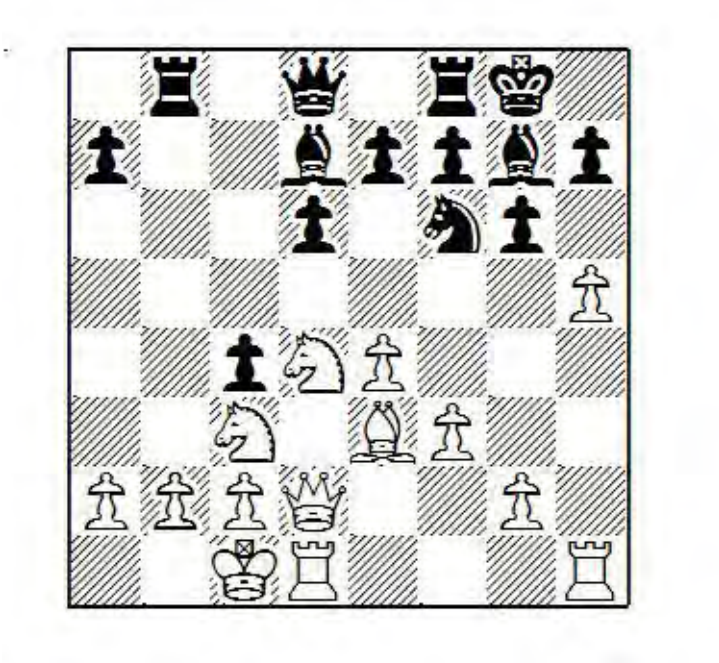
12 ... b5

The normal move in this line but 12 ... Nxb3+ 13 Nxb3 a5 14 Nd4 b5 15 h5 e6 is not entirely without appeal for Black, although it may turn out to be a bit too slow after 16 Kb1 b4 17 Nce2 followed by g2-g4.

13 h5 Nc4 14 Bxc4

Milos Pavlovic had recommended 14 Qf2!? here and this line was analysed in detail by David Vigorito in his *Chess Developments: The Sicilian Dragon*. But ultimately Black appears to be doing fine after 14 ... Nxe3 15 Qxe3 b4! 16 Nce2 (16 hxg6 is likely an improvement as after 16 ... hxg6 17 e5!? bxc3 18 exf6 cxb2+ 19 Kb1 exf6 20 Qf4 Re8 21 Qxd6 Qe7 22 Qg3 Kf8, a complicated position with mutual chances arises) 16 ... e5 17 Nf5 (17 hxg6 hxg6 18 Qg5 is met by 18 ... exd4 19 Qxg6 Ba4! 20 Qg3 Bxb3 21 axb3 Qc7 22 Nxd4 Rfc8 23 Rd2 Qa5 24 Kb1 Qe5 and Black has gained some sort of control over the mess) 17 ... gxf5 18 h6 f4 19 Qg1 Bh8 20 g3 Re8 21 gxf4+ Kf8 22 Rxd6 was played in C.Dorrington-I.Snape, Hinckley Island 2008, and now 22 ... Qe7 23 Ra6 Rb7 24 Rxa7 Rxa7 25 Qxa7 Bb5 looks sensible and good for Black.

14 ... bxc4 15 Bh6



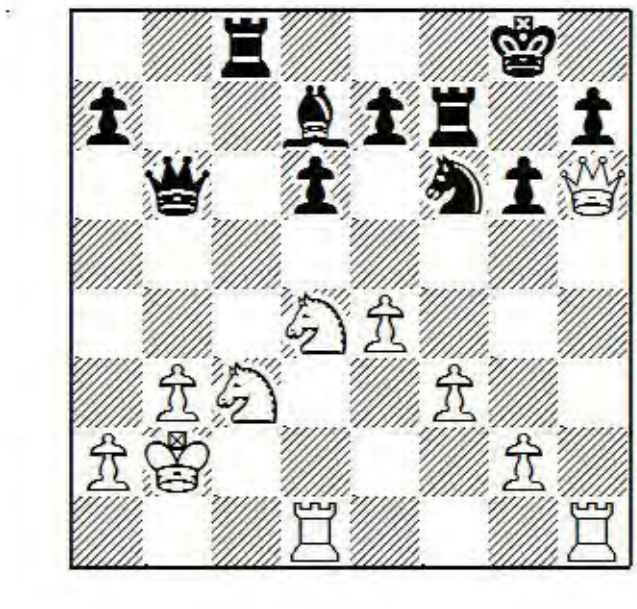
Let's examine the alternatives to this direct style of play:

a) In S.Shankland-O.Cvitan, Biel 2014, White played the more modest-looking, but nevertheless fairly strong 15 Kb1 Re8 16 h6 Bh8 17 Nde2 Qa5 18 Bd4 Qa3 19 Qc1 Rb7 20 Ka1 Qa5 21 Qd2 Reb8 22 Rb1 Rc8 (22 ... Bc6 23 Rhd1 e5 24 Be3 Rd7 leads to a similar position) 23 g4 e5 24 Be3 Rc6 25 g5 (25 b4!? cxb3 26 Rxb3 Rxb3 27 cxb3 Be6 28 Kb1 also looks better for White) 25 ... Ne8 26 Rhd1 and even though Black is close to equality, it is not an easy position to play and the young American tortured his experienced grandmaster opponent for more than 100 moves before settling for a draw.

Question: Why is opening the h-file with 15 hxg6 somewhat premature?

Answer: It allows Black to form a seventh rank defence of his h-pawn after 15 ... fxg6 and the f7-square can be used by the king's rook to hold the fort.

b) Personally, I think that White should wait a bit before exchanging on g6, because it tends to help Black in making his position more flexible. In any case, it has been played on several occasions with varying degrees of fortune. After 15 hxg6 fxg6 16 Bh6 Qb6 17 b3 cxb3 (17 ... Bxh6!? 18 Qxh6 Rf7 19 Qg5 Rc8 looked promising for Black in R.Webb-P.Littlewood, West Bromwich 2005) 18 cxb3 (Ward had suggested 18 ... Bxh6 19 Qxh6 Rf7! 20 Qg5 Rc8 21 Nd5 Nxd5 22 exd5 Qa5 23 Kb2 e5 24 Ne2 Bf5 25 Rd2 Rb7 and White is in trouble, D.Ledger-G.Jones, North Shields 2012) 18 ... Bxh6 19 Qxh6 Rbc8 20 Kb2 Rf7.



This defensive resource is why White has to be careful when considering to exchange on g6 as the h7-pawn is now protected. After 21 g4 e5 22 Nde2 Be6 23 g5 Nd7!, Pg Mohd Omar-F.Grafl, Budapest 2003, the knight is heading to the queenside where Black's forces are gathering the necessary strength for invasion, while White's attack on the h-file is underwhelming,

15 ... Qb6

After 15 ... Qa5 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 hxg6 fxg6 18 Qh6+ Kg8 (I'm not so sure about 18 ... Kf7 19 g4 Ke8 20 g5 Nh5) 19 Nd5 Rf7 20 Nxf6+ exf6 21 Kb1 f5 22 exf5 Bxf5 23 Nxf5 Qxf5, Black seems to stand okay. It seems that Black would have gained in these lines compared to similar critical lines in the ... Qa5 variations as there is no need to take time out to place a rook on the c-line.

16 b3 Bxh6

Black has also tried 16 ... cxb3 and now 17 axb3 (it makes less sense recapturing with the c-pawn with cxb3 Bxh6 18 Qxh6 Rfc8 19 Kb2 Qc5 20 Rd3 Qc4 21 Qe3 e5 and Black is clearly doing fine, R.Thogersen-N.Georgiadis, Batumi 2014) 17 ... Bh8? (this is just too slow and Black should nearly always exchange on h6 in this variation with 17 ... Bxh6 18 Qxh6 Rfc8 19 Kb2 Qb4 20 Qd2 Rc5 21 hxg6 fxg6 and the chances are roughly even) 18 Bxf8 Rxf8 19 g4 Rc8? (19 ... Qa5 20 Nb1 is clearly better for

White, but nevertheless better than what now happens in the game) 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 g5 Nh5 22 Nd5 Qd8 23 Rxh5 gxh5 24 Nf5 Bxf5 25 exf5 Rb8 26 Qe3 Kf8 27 g6 Rb7 28 Qe6 has Black resigning in K.Szabo-I.Porat, Budapest 2008.

17 Qxh6 Qa5

Or 17 ... cxb3 18 axb3 Rfc8 19 Kb2 Qc5 20 Rd3 Bb5 21 Ndxb5 Rxb5 22 hxg6 fxg6 23 Qe3 Qxe3 24 Rxe3 Rbc5 and Black is fine, S.Franklin-K.Nemcova, Purley 2013.

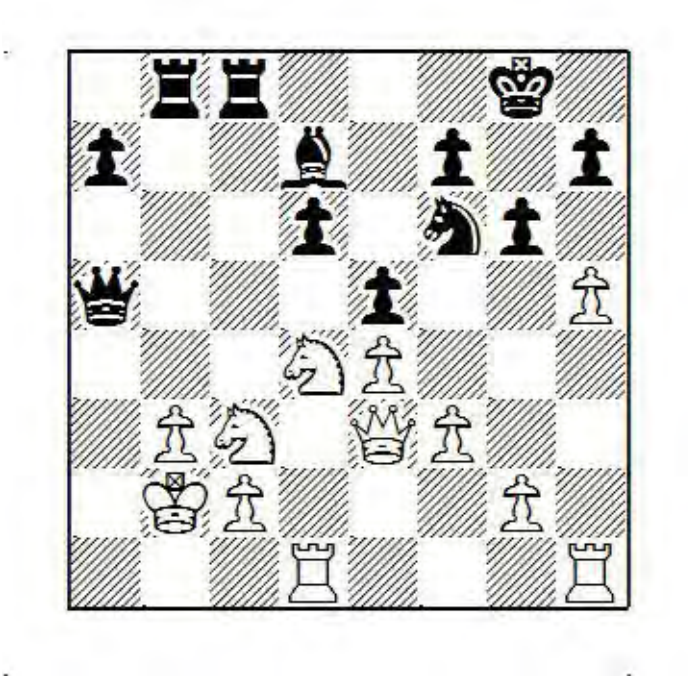
18 Kb2 Rfc8 19 Qe3 cxb3

Black can also retain the tension with:

a) 19 ... Qe5 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 Nde2 (21 g4!? should be considered) 21 ... a5 22 Qd4 Qxd4 23 Rxd4 a4 and it is clear that Black has taken over control of the game, V.Draganic-M.Sebenik, Sarajevo 2014.

b) Also 19 ... Rc5, taking complete control of the fifth rank looks like a decent idea for Black.

20 axb3 e5?!



Question: You are calling this move dubious. It looks like a standard move. What's wrong with dislodging the knight from its central spot?

Answer: You have to be careful playing moves just because they are 'standard' moves. Here I cannot see any really good reason for this move. It kicks the d4-knight away, but why is that important? Instead, Black leaves the d6-pawn weak and removes the possibility of the queen assisting in the defence of the kingside.

Conversely, 20 ... Qe5 21 hxg6 fxg6 looks more reasonable. White should have the better chances, but Black is certainly still alive.

21 Nde2 Qc5?

On 21 ... Nxh5, 22 Rxd6 Be6 23 Nd5 looks like an easy way to a clear advantage.

Question: Black is offering a queen trade to enter a thankless ending since 22 Qxc5 dxc5 23 Nd5 Nxd5 24 Rxd5 hits the d7-bishop and e5-pawn simultaneously, thus winning a pawn. Should White enter this line?

22 Qg5!

Answer: No. White wins by force with this queen sally. The hit on the f6-knight gains an important tempo which allows the white pieces to crash through the kingside.

22 ... Bb5?

Now Black's position crumbles quickly. However, if Black sacrifices the knight instead with 22 ... Nxh5 23 Rxh5 f6 24 Qg3, a few accurate moves by White are required and after 24 ... Be6 25 Rh6 Bxb3 26 cxb3 Qc4 27 Kc1 Rxb3 28 Kd2 Rxc3 29 Nxc3 Qxc3+ 30 Ke2, the king escapes with the material

advantage intact.

23 hxg6 fxg6 24 Qxf6 Bxe2 25 Qe6+ Kh8

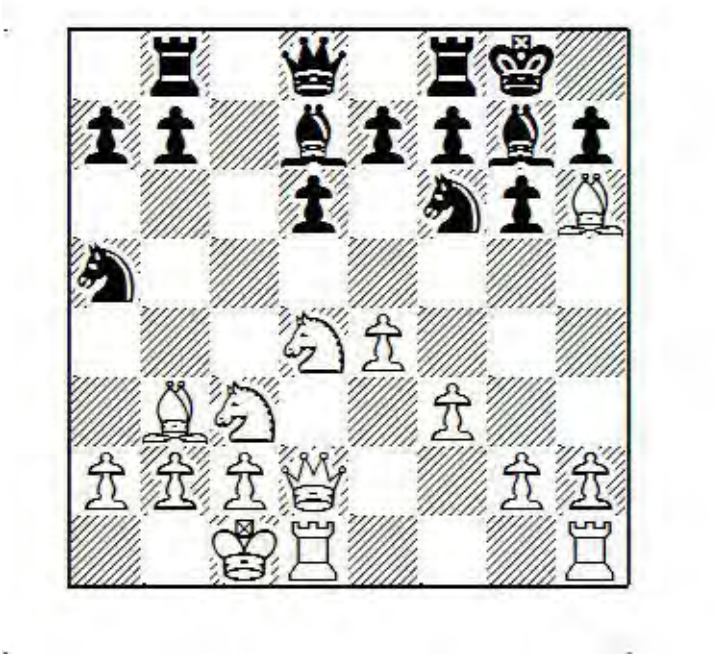
Allowing White to force mate. However, 25 ... Kf8 26 Qxd6+ Qxd6 27 Rxd6 is not much of an existence either.

26 Rxh7+ Kxh7 27 Qf7+ Kh6 28 Rh1+ Kg5 29 f4+ Kg4 30 Qxg6+ 1-0

With mate just a few moves away, Black resigned.

Game 75
L.Dominguez Perez-M.Carlsen
Linares 2009

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Rb8 11 Bb3 Na5 12 Bh6



From being a somewhat lowly regarded line, 12 Bh6 has clearly become the line of choice. Now, it is seen far more often than any other move in this variation. White immediately decides to eliminate the Dragon bishop and then waits to decide which direction to take the game.

12 ... Bxh6

Question: Why does Black want to exchange on h6 in this situation? There is no exchange sacrifice available on c3 or even an apparent queenside attack going on. So where is the upside for Black?

Answer: Black aims to prove that the queen is misplaced on h6. Furthermore, before White can get an attack going on the kingside, Black will most definitely also have something rolling on the queenside.

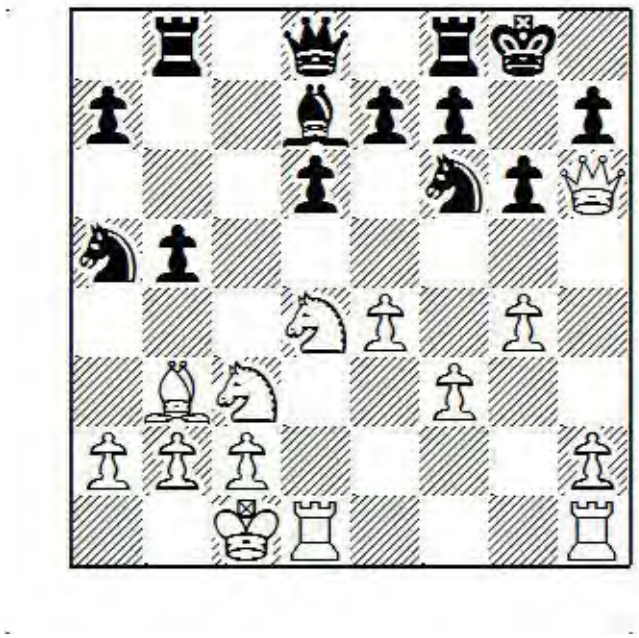
The main alternative is 12 ... b5 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 Nd5 (or 14 g4 b4 15 Nd5 Nxb3+ 16 Nxb3 Nxd5 17 exd5 Rb6 18 h4 h6 19 Qd4+ and White is already comfortably better, E.Bacrot-J.Degraeve, Germany 2010, but both 14 ... Nc4 and 14 ... e5 followed by ... b5-b4 are perfectly fine for Black) 14 ... Nc4 (14 ... e5 15 Nxf6 Kxf6 16 Ne2 Nxb3+ 17 cxb3 Rb6 is creative, but not very good, O.Stubberud-R.Gerber, Rhodes 2013, as after 18 Qh6 followed by f3-f4, only White can be better) 15 Bxc4 bxc4 16 Nxf6 exf6 17 g4 (17 Qc3 Qb6 18 Kb1 Rb7 19 Ka1 Rfb8 20 Rb1 and here 20 ... Qc5 would have kept the chances about level in E.Rodriguez Guerrero-P.Charbonneau, La Roche sur Yon 2006) 17 ... Qb6 18 Qc3 Rb7 19 g5 Rfb8 20 gxf6+ Kh8 21 b4 cxb3 22 Nxb3 Rc8 and Black has grabbed the initiative, A.Abreu Delgado-F.Corrales Jimenez, Havana 2006.

13 Qxh6 b5

The immediate 13 ... e5!? avoids some of the issues of the main line, which is covered in our main game. Now 14 Nde2 (or 14 Ndb5 Nxb3+ 15 axb3 Bxb5 16 Nxb5 and here Black defends the pawn by

playing 16 ... Qa5 17 Na3 Rfd8 with fairly even chances) 14 ... b5 15 Rxd6 (15 Kb1 Nxb3 16 cxb3 b4 17 Nd5 Nxd5 18 Rxd5 Be6 19 Rd2 Rb6 gives Black a pleasant game in S.Satyapragyan-T.Hansen, San Sebastian 2012 while 15 h4 transposes to 13 ... b5 14 h4 e5 15 Nde2 which is covered below) 15 ... b4! 16 Nb1?! (White has two better options in 16 Nd5 Nxb3+ 17 axb3 Nxd5 18 Rxd5 Qc7 19 Kb1 Be6 and Black has adequate compensation for the pawn, R.Nolte-D.Nguyen, Kuala Lumpur 2012, or 16 Na4!? which leads to a draw after 16 ... Nb7 17 Rd2 Qe8 18 Ng3! Bxa4 19 Nf5 gxf5 20 Qg5+ Kh8 21 Qxf6+ Kg8 as in E.Barbosa-M.Roganovic, Chennai 2010) 16 ... Nxb3+ (16 ... Qe7!? 17 Rhd1 Bb5 18 Ng3 Nxb3+ 19 axb3 Ne8 20 R6d2 Ng7 and Black has the somewhat better chances according to Motylev) 17 axb3 Ne8 18 Rd3 Qc7 19 Rhd1 Bb5 20 c4!? (20 R3d2 Ng7 is depressing to look at for White, who seems to be getting pushed off the board) 20 ... bxc3 21 Rxc3 Qb7 with better chances for Black, A.Zhigalko-A.Motylev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

14 g4

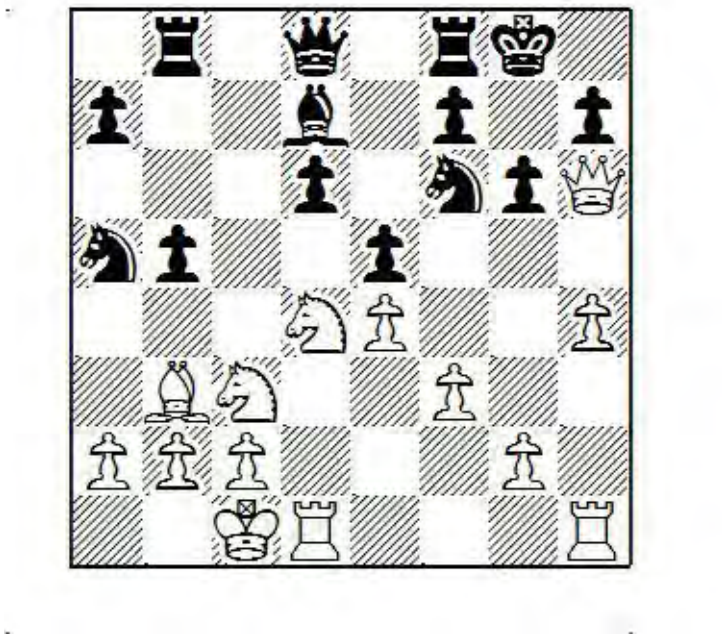


Question: Wouldn't it be faster to attack with the h-pawn instead of the g-pawn? I mean, the g-pawn cannot open any files to Black's king by itself, right?

Answer: You are right, that it cannot open any files by itself. But there are a number of other reasons behind this move. The primary reason is that it prevents Black's standard plan of ... e7-e5 followed by ... b5-b4. A plan we will see demonstrated when White pushes the h-pawn instead.

Other options:

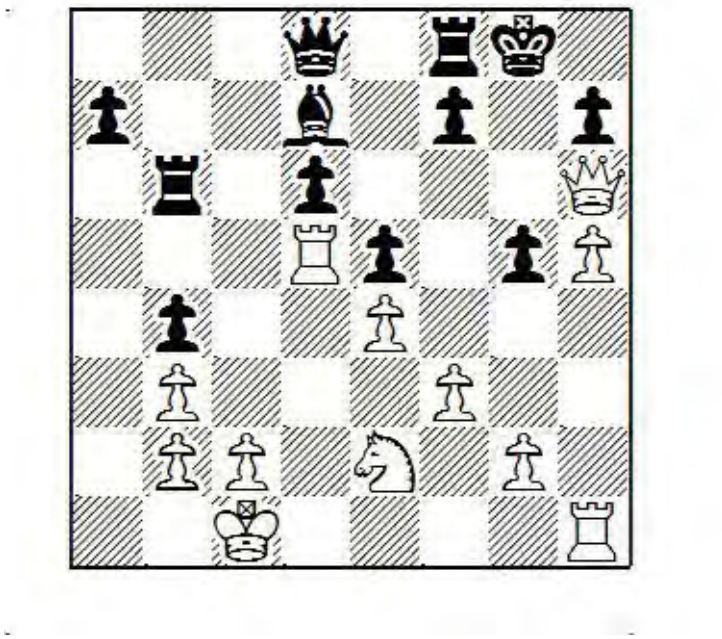
a) 14 h4 e5!



Question: Why is this 'weakening' pawn thrust playable now?

Answer: With the Dragon bishop gone, it doesn't hurt Black as much to play this move and since the b3-bishop is easily eliminated, it does not create any unnecessary weaknesses either. Furthermore when White plays h4-h5 and hxg6, then Black can defend along the 7th rank with his rook, an idea we have seen several times throughout the book.

After 15 Nde2 b4 16 Nd5 Nxb3+ 17 axb3 Nxd5 18 Rxd5 Rb6 (18 ... Be6 is also playable, although a lot less flexible and after 19 h5 Rb7 20 Rb5!? Qe7 21 Rxb7 Qxb7, chances are quite even, B.Michiels-V.Mikhalevski, Metz 2011) 19 h5, Black has 19 ... g5!



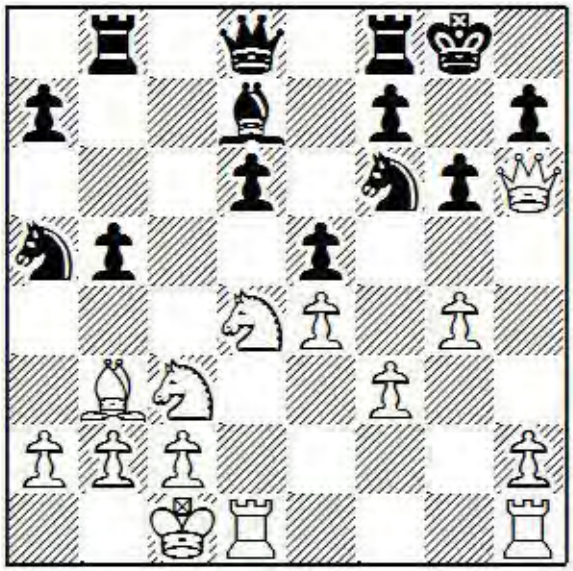
This way of caging in the White queen should be familiar to you by now, and of course it is well worth a pawn to do so. Following 20 f4 (20 Rxd6?! f6 21 Rhd1 Rxd6 22 Rxd6 Qe7 23 Rd2 Be6 24 Ng3?! was played in Z.Almasi-O.Cvitan, Bastia 2013, and now Black should play 24 ... a5 25 Kb1 a4! 26 bxa4 b3! and White will not be able to fend off the back rank threats) 20 ... Bg4 21 Nd4 gxf4 22 g3 fxg3 23 Nf5 Bxf5 24 Rd3 g2 25 Rg3+ Bg6 26 Rxg2 Qe7 27 hxg6 fxg6 28 Rxg6+ and here Black should simply have accepted the draw after 28 ... hxg6, K.Abhishek-P.Konguvel, Delhi 2010.

b) 14 Nd5 also makes a great deal of sense, eliminating Black's f6-knight which usually comes in

handy when defending the kingside. Black's best appears to be 14 ... e6 15 Nxf6+ Qxf6 16 h4 Qg7 17 Qg5 Qe5 18 Ne2 Bc6 19 Rd2 Rfd8 20 Rhd1 Nb7 21 Nf4 a5 22 a3 Re8 23 Nd3 Qxg5 24 hxg5 Kg7 25 e5 Red8 26 exd6 Rxd6 with more or less equal chances in the ending, S.Kudrin-A.Shabalov, Internet 2009.

14 ... Nxb3+

Question: Why not 14 ... e5 now? Why is it not playable when it is all right after 14 h4?



Answer: The reason why 14 g4 prevents 14 ... e5? comes to light when White throws 15 Nf5! in Black's face. The knight cannot be taken with the pawn and capturing it with bishop isn't very palatable either:

a) After 15 ... gxf5 16 g5, Black must return the piece after 16 ... Nxb3+ 17 Nxb3 Nxe4 (17 ... Ne8 18 Nd5 f6 19 Rhg1 is a forced kill) 18 fxe4 Be6 19 Nd5 Bxd5 20 exf5! Kh8 21 Rxd5 with a torrid game.

b) Black is also suffering after 15 ... Bxf5 16 exf5 Nxb3+ 17 axb3 Kh8 18 Rhe1 b4 19 Ne4 Nxe4 20 Rxe4.

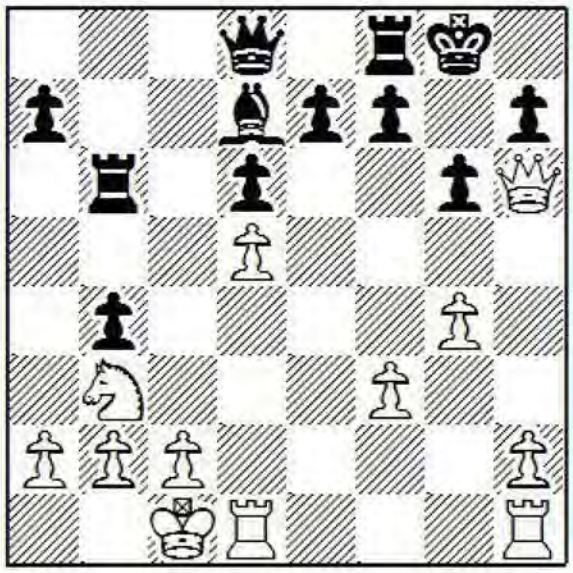
15 Nxb3

With 15 axb3 b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 exd5 e5 18 dxe6 fxe6, we reach a position not too different from what we are seeing in the game. The open a-file does provide Black with some additional possibilities. However the chances should be more or less even.

15 ... b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5

A more recent alternative and quite important alternative is 16 ... e5!? (yes, it's that move again) 17 Ne3 Be6 18 h4 Kh8 19 Qg5 Rb6 20 Na5 Kg7 21 Nf5+ Bxf5 22 gxf5 as seen in V.Kotronias-V.Ivanchuk, Caleta 2011, and here Vigorito recommends 22 ... h6! 23 Qg2 Ra6 24 Nc4 Qc8 25 b3 (25 Nxd6? Qc7 26 Nb5 Qc5 27 Qe2 Ra5 is much better for Black) 25 ... d5 26 exd5 Qxf5 and both sides have their share of chances.

17 exd5 Rb6!



Question: Why does Black play this move? If he follows up with ... Ra6, then White just plays Kb1, parrying everything, right?

Answer: Black is not thinking about playing ... Ra6 just yet. The idea behind the rook move is to prepare ... e7-e5 by guarding the d6-pawn. If White captures en passant on e6, Black will recapture with the f-pawn, changing the entire dynamics of the position.

18 Rhe1

White centralises his rook in anticipation of ... e7-e5, but the question remains whether this is really the most useful square for the rook.

It seems logical to question Black on the kingside, by starting some sort initiative to keep Black occupied. Therefore 18 h4 e5, and now we look at:

a) 19 dxe6 fxe6 20 Rd3 (Khalifman has suggested 20 Qe3, but as indicated by Rogozenco, Black has no problems after 20 ... Qf6 21 Nc5 dxc5 22 Rxd7 Ra6 23 Qh6 Qf4+ 24 Qxf4 Rxf4 25 Rd8+ Kg7 with equal chances) 20 ... Bb5 21 Re3 e5 22 h5 g5 23 Qe6+ Kh8 24 Nd2 Bd7 25 Qd5 and Black has at least equal chances, despite his odd pawn structure, K.Maslak-M.Porat, Pardubice 2008.

b) 19 Nd2 Ra6 20 Ne4 f5 21 Ng5 (21 h5 fxe4 22 hxg6 Qe7 23 fxe4 has been discussed by both Pavlovic and Vigorito, but Black seems to be doing okay after 23 ... Bb5 24 gxh7+ Kh8, even if White ultimately has compensation for the piece) 21 ... Qe7 22 h5 Rf6 23 hxg6 (23 Kb1 is harmless and likely forces a draw after 23 ... Qg7 24 hxg6 Qxh6 25 Rxh6 Rxg6 26 Rxh7 Be8 27 Rdh1 Rxg5, forcing a perpetual check with the rook, A.Demchenko-E.Kanter, Nizhny Tagil 2014) 23 ... Rxg6 24 Qxh7+ Qxh7 25 Nxh7 Rxa2?! (25 ... Kf7! 26 gxf5 Rg2 27 Rhg1 Rxg1 28 Rxg1 Bxf5 is approximately equal) 26 Kb1 Ra5 27 g5 Bb5 28 Nf6+ and White is winning, P.Darini-R.Khusnutdinov, Zaozhuang 2012.

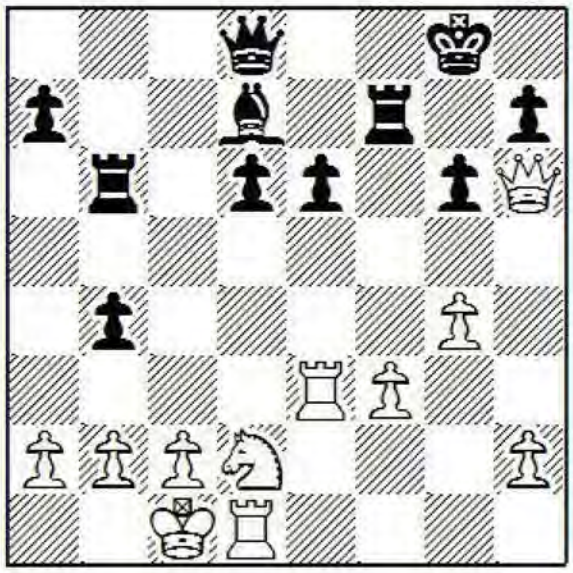
18 ... e5 19 dxe6 fxe6 20 Re3

White plays quite ambitiously, claiming that he is positionally better, but in fact Black is doing rather well at this point. Instead he should have retreated his queen from h6 where it currently does very little.

20 ... Rf7

In my opinion, this is a typical Carlsen move, not really threatening anything, but marginally improving his position before grinding along. My computer instead suggest 20 ... e5, claiming an edge for Black, which seems entirely reasonable.

21 Nd2



This is part of White's positional plan, trying to get Black to play ... d6-d5, weakening the dark squares.

21 ... d5

Magnus obliges. But in fact Black had a very interesting alternative at this juncture in 21 ... Qc7 22 Ne4 Rc6 23 Re2 Qa5 24 Ng5, which looks perfectly normal, but here Black has 24 ... b3! and after 25 a3 Qb5 26 Red2 bxc2 27 Rh1 Rc3, Black is doing very well indeed.

22 Nb3

With his little mission of getting Black to weaken the dark squares accomplished, the knight returns to b3. However, White has invested a couple of tempi in a very ambitious plan that has done very little to harm Black. Moreover, White's position still suffers from the fact that the queen is out of play on h6.

22 ... Qc7 23 Kb1 Rb8 24 Rde1?!

White continues to take his time pursuing his positional plan. The idea behind the text move is to prevent Black from playing ... e6-e5 and now White wants to follow-up with Nd4. But aside from the e5-square, White really does not have control over the dark squares and furthermore, the c2- and f3-pawns are soft as well.

24 ... Rc8 25 R1e2

Unfortunately for White, 25 Nd4 is met with 25 ... Rf4 26 Rd3 e5 and White's game plan explodes in his own face.

25 ... Qb6 26 h4

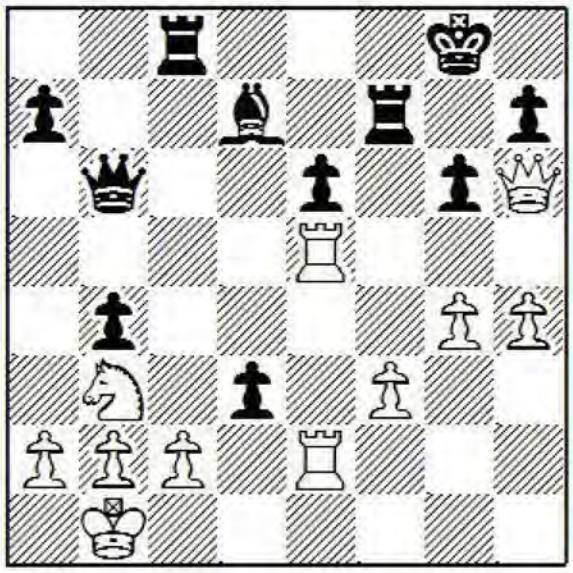
With this move, White basically admits that his strategy was flawed and he now has to create counterplay through other means.

The lesser evil is 26 Nc1, which still tends to his original game plan, well at least a little. After the text move, things soon fall apart.

26 ... d4 27 Re5

Of course not 27 Rd3? which runs into 27 ... Bb5.

27 ... d3!



Now Black just crashes through.

28 cxd3 Rxf3 29 d4?

With careful defence, it is still possible for White to stay in the game. However, slugging it out with Black, whose heavy pieces are ideally placed, is not a good idea:

a) For instance, after 29 h5? Rxd3 30 Re1 Qf2 31 R5e2 Qxe2! 32 Rxe2 Rd1+ 33 Qc1 Rcxc1+ 34 Nxc1 gxh5 35 gxh5 Rd5, Black is winning according to Rogozenco.

b) It is more prudent to return her majesty the queen from her excursion to h6 and have her participate in the defence of the home turf with 29 Qd2 but even so, after 29 ... Bb5 30 R5e3 Rcf8 31 Rxf3 Rxf3 32 Nc1 Qd6, Black is completely in control of the game.

29 ... Bb5

Now the bishop joins in as well. Magnus makes things look very easy indeed.

30 R2e3

Here Rogozenco offers 30 Re1 Rxb3! 31 axb3 Bd3+ 32 Ka2 Qa6+ mate or 30 Rxe6 Qxe6 31 Rxe6 Bd3+ 32 Ka1 Rf1+, once again with mate to follow.

30 ... Bd3+ 31 Ka1 Qxd4

A lovely move, but Black can in fact play the far stronger 31 ... Rf2! (threatening ... Rxb2!!) 32 Re1 Rxb2! 33 Kxb2 Rc2+ 34 Ka1 Qc6! 35 Rc5 Rxa2+ 36 Kxa2 Qa4+ 37 Kb2 Qa3 mate (Rogozenco).

32 Rxe6 Rf1+ 33 Re1 Qxg4 34 Rxf1 Qxe6 35 Nc5 Qe2 36 Rc1 Bf5

White is stuck in an unpleasant pin and is basically lost.

37 Qf4 a5 38 h5 Qe7 39 Qc4+?

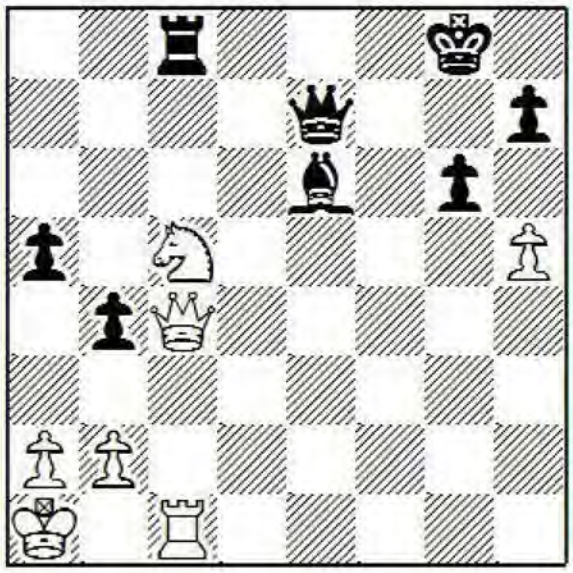
With just two moves left before the time control, White makes a critical error. With 39 hxg6!, he could still keep the pot boiling:

a) Black cannot capture the knight as after 39 ... Rxc5?? due to 40 gxh7+ Kxh7 41 Qh2+ Kg8 (41 ... Bh3 42 Qxh3+ Kg7 43 Rg1+ Rg5 44 Rh1 and Black has the choice of getting mated or enter a pawn endgame where the king is too far away) 42 Qg1+, winning the c5-rook and with that the game.

b) 39 ... hxg6 40 Qc4+ Qf7 (40 ... Be6 does not accomplish anything as after 41 Qd4, Black is forced to repeat the moves with 41 ... Bf5 since 41 ... Qg5? 42 Rh1 Bh3! barely keeps Black in the game) 41 Qd4 Qf8! and Black is better, but the conversion is, on account of the very open king, quite tricky.

39 ... Be6!

White may have missed this move in his time trouble. Now the pin on the c-file decides the game.



40 Qc2

A look at the other queen moves:

a) After 40 Qd4 Qg5, White does not have Rh1 available (unlike the 39 hxg6 hxg6 line) and thus, following 41 Rc2 Qd5 42 Qxd5 Bxd5, Black wins easily.

b) 40 Qe4 looks significantly better though after 40 ... Rxc5 41 Rxc5 Qxc5 42 Qxe6+ Kg7, it emerges that White has serious problems because of the back rank. If White guards it with the queen then Black picks up the h5-pawn. However, after 43 a3 bxa3 44 Ka2 axb2 45 hxg6 hxg6, Black has two extra pawns, but queen endings can be tricky due to the high risk of getting into perpetual check.

40 ... Qg5 41 hxg6 hxg6

Both players have reached the time control so now comes the conversion stage. However, thanks to White's pieces being so tied up, it turns out to be rather easy.

42 a3 bxa3 43 Qc3 axb2+

Also 43 ... Qd5 44 b3 a4 ends all White resistance rather quickly.

44 Kxb2 Qd5

The queen dominates the entire board from this square, and also importantly, prevents White from seeking counterplay with Rh1.

45 Rc2 a4 46 Ka1 a3 47 Qe3 Bf7 48 Qc3 g5 49 Qe3 Re8

Another straightforward win is 49 ... Qh1+ 50 Rc1 Qg2 51 Qxa3 Ra8 52 Na6 Qe2 53 Rc6 Qf1+ 54 Kb2 Qb5+ and White's pieces are falling.

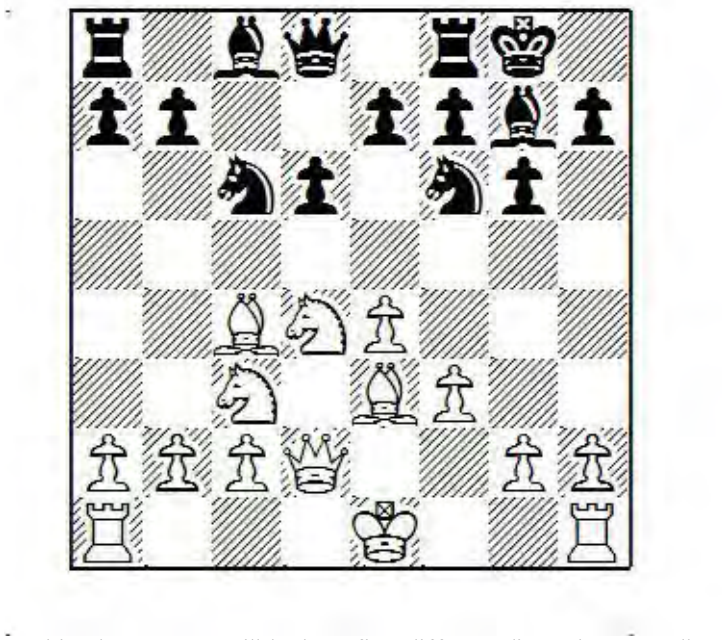
50 Qc3 Re2 51 Nb3

Of course, 51 Rxe2 runs into 51 ... Qd1+.

51 ... Rxc2 52 Qxc2 Qe5+ 53 Kb1 Kg7 54 Qd2 Bxb3 0-1

Chapter Sixteen
Yugoslav Attack with Bc4: Alternatives on Move 9 and 10

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4



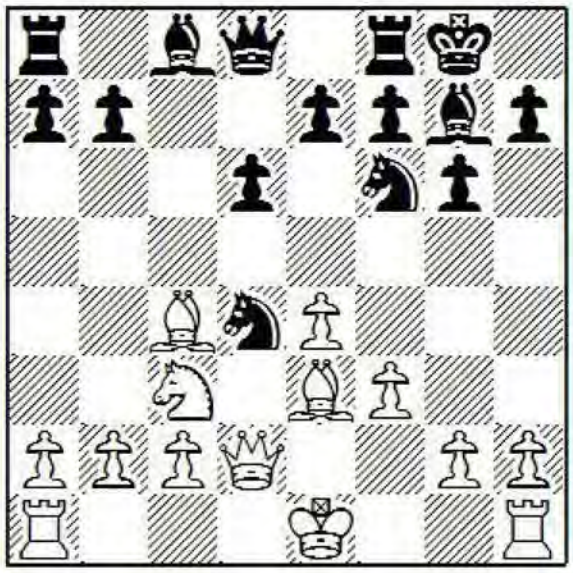
In this chapter we will look at five different lines that are all wildly different, but have one thing in common: they are infrequently played. There are several reasons for this. One could then make the assumption that it is because they are not all that good, and that would not be entirely wrong. But I think it is more correct to say that they are not as flexible as most of the other lines we have looked at in the previous chapters. Also, some of them have not yet caught broad attention from more than a few top players and that alone limits the exposure of the particular line.

The most solid option of the ones we will look at in this chapter is the one used by Black in Game 76. Nakamura plays the old 9 ... Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6 against another world-class player. An unusual option for Black is 9 ... a5, Byrne's old move, which we see utilised in Game 77. Speaking of unusual, of all the artificial and peculiar looking ideas available to Black in Dragon, Game 78 certainly illustrates one of the most bizarre ones, Black transfers his knight with ... Nf6-d7-b6, apparently to fight for the c4-square. In our penultimate example, Game 79, we see a major Dragon specialist test the ... Na5 setup. It does not work out too well for Black in our main game, but as seen in the alternatives in the notes, there are ways for Black to entertain this idea more successfully. In the final game of this book, Game 80, White tests a slightly different set-up, placing his queen on e2. This tricky move has been favoured by a few grandmasters.

Once you have gone through the game and the analysis in this chapter, maybe you will find a line or two that you can see yourself employing, maybe as a surprise weapon, maybe as a regular part of your opening repertoire.

Game 76
A.Grischuk-H. Nakamura
London 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 0-0 8 Qd2 Nc6 9 Bc4 Nxd4



This move was tested by Bent Larsen in the late 1950s against both Fischer and Tal. Unsurprisingly in both cases, Larsen got himself in trouble and lost. However, the move is not bad per se. Like in the Topalov Variation 9 ... Bd7 10 0-0-0 (or the Accelerated Variation 10 Bb3 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 b5) 10 ... Rc8 11 Bb3 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 b5, Black makes this early exchange of the knights on d4. However, the idea here is not to make an early ... b7-b5 advance but to exchange a couple of minor pieces to ease his own development and limit White's options.

10 Bxd4 Be6

Black develops and forces White to make a decision regarding the light-squared bishops.

11 Bb3

Question: Why not give Black doubled e-pawns?

Answer: 11 Bxe6 fxe6 doesn't cause Black many headaches:

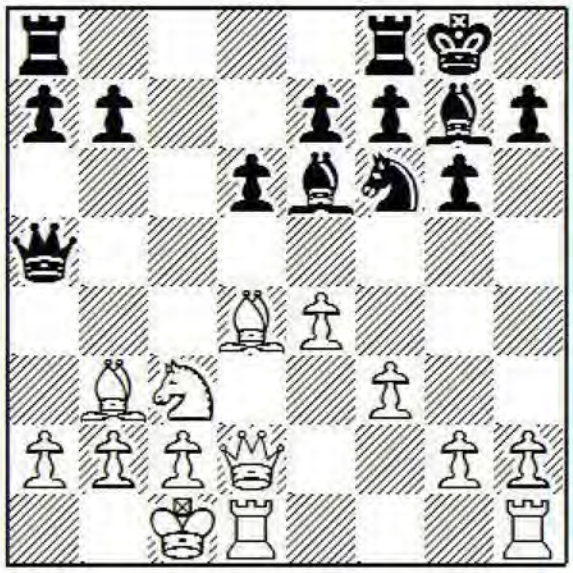
a) 12 0-0-0 Qa5 13 Kb1 Rac8 14 Rhe1 (14 h4 Rc4 left Black no worse in M.Calzetta Ruiz-U.Andersson, Villarrobledo (rapid) 1998) 14 ... Rc4 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nd5 Qxd2 17 Nxf6+ Rxf6 18 Rxd2 e5 and Black had no issues in endgame, A.Skytte Hagen-T.Bakre, Budapest 2012.

b) If White tries to force more pieces off the board and isolate Black's doubled e-pawns, it plays to Black's advantage after 12 e5?! dxe5! 13 Bxe5 Qxd2+ 14 Kxd2 Rfd8+ 15 Ke2 Rac8 (Gufeld) and Black has the initiative in the endgame.

11 ... Qa5

Also playable is 11 ... Rc8 though it is certainly not Black's most accurate continuation, as he ideally would want the f8-rook to move to the c-file. In P.Svidler-E.Pigusov, Mainz 2002, White grabbed the initiative after 12 0-0-0 (another option was 12 h4 Qa5 13 Bxe6 fxe6 14 0-0-0 Nh5 15 Kb1 Rc4 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Ne2 Qxd2 18 Rxd2 Nf4 19 Nxf4 Rxf4 20 Rd3 e5 and the fact that Black ended up winning this game can only boil down to careless defending by White, A.Bodnaruk-B.Socko, St Petersburg (rapid) 2012) 12 ... Bxb3 13 cxb3! Rc6 (13 ... b5 14 Kb1 Qd7 15 g4 is also pleasant for White) 14 Kb1 Qd7 15 g4 Rfc8 16 h4.

12 0-0-0



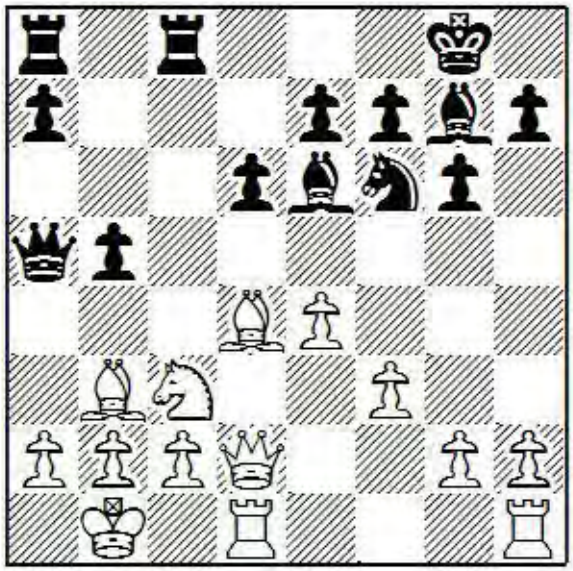
Now White enters a position that could also have been reached through the 9 0-0-0 Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Qa5 11 Bc4 Be6 12 Bb3 move order.

Instead of castling queenside, White can aim for safer ground by sending the king in the opposite direction with 12 0-0 Rfc8 13 Rad1 Bc4 14 Rfe1 Rc6 15 Qf2 e6 16 Qh4 Ne8 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 f4 Rac8 and Black has little to worry about, P.Blehm-T.Markowski, Warsaw 2001.

12 ... Rfc8

Larsen's preferred continuation was 12 ... b5. Now 13 Kb1 b4 (13 ... Bxb3?! exchanges the bishop too soon, which is evidenced by the following line 14 cxb3 b4? 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nd5 and Black is clearly worse) 14 Nd5 Bxd5 15 exd5 (15 Bxd5?! was played by Fischer, but Black is absolutely fine after 15 ... Nxd5 16 Bxg7 Nc3+! 17 Bxc3 bxc3 18 Qxc3 Qxc3 19 bxc3 Rfc8 and White's extra pawn is of no use) 15 ... Qb5 16 Rhe1 (the alternative is 16 Qd3 Qxd3 17 Rxd3 Rfc8 18 Re1 Rc7 19 c3 a5 20 cxb4 axb4 21 Rc1 Rxc1+ 22 Kxc1 Nd7 23 Rd1 Nc5, and Black is fine, E.Inarkiev-V.Zvjaginsev, Kazan 2005) 16 ... a5 17 Qe2 Qxe2 18 Rxe2 a4 19 Bc4 Rfc8 20 b3 Rc7 has been played several times, including in V.Areshchenko-V.Zvjaginsev, Sochi 2005, where Black proved to be okay, even if White may have an optical advantage.

13 Kb1 b5



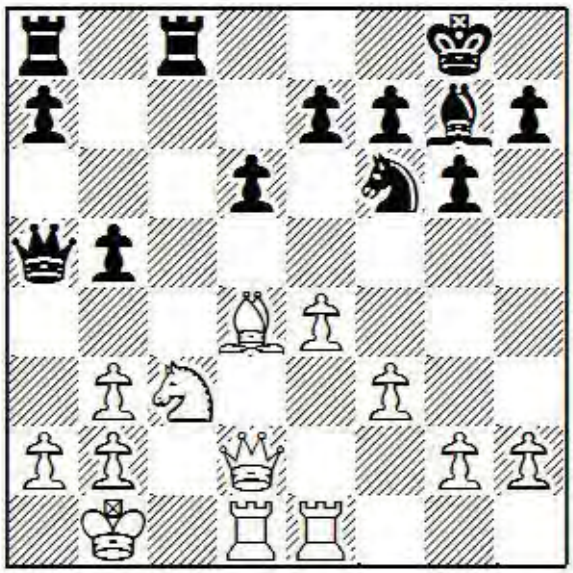
14 Rhe1

White has the alternative 14 Bxf6?! Bxf6 15 Nd5 Qxd2 and now 16 Nxf6+ is the point behind White's 14th move. Now if Black had to recapture with the pawn, then White would have a solid endgame advantage. However, things are rarely that easy. After 16 ... Kg7!, Black has equalised. Now, White's best is 17 Nh5+ (17 Rxd2 Kxf6 is obviously completely harmless for Black, who may in fact have the minimally better chances in the endgame, thanks to his active king) 17 ... gxh5 18 Rxd2 Rc6 (or 18 ... Rc5 and a draw was agreed in A.Giri-H.Nakamura, Wijk aan Zee 2012, which of course is early, but realistically speaking neither side can expect to win from this position) 19 f4 Kf6 20 Re1 Rg8 21 Rf2 Bxb3 22 axb3 b4 23 Re3 Rg4 24 c3 a5 and chances were fairly even in L.Aroshidze-P.H.Nielsen, Barcelona 2012.

14 ... Bxb3

Black has to be careful with his move orders in this line. For instance 14 ... b4 15 Nd5 Bxd5 16 exd5 is quite comfortable for White.

15 cxb3!



Question: How can it make sense to recapture away from the centre?

Answer: This illogical move helps White to take the sting out of everything Black is doing on the queenside, reinforcing the shield in front of the king and neutralising whatever pressure Black may have hoped to generate along the c-file.

15 ... Rab8

Again, 15 ... b4 is premature, forcing an undesirable endgame for Black after 16 Bxf6 bxc3 (16 ... Bxf6?! 17 Nd5 obviously doesn't work for Black) 17 Bxc3 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Rxc3 19 Re3 Rac8 20 Rxc3 Rxc3 21 Kb2 Rc5 22 Qxa5 Rxa5 and while White's advantage doesn't appear very large, he has the ability to create a remote passed pawn supported by the white king, M.Golubev-Zazuliak, Mukachevo 2009.

16 Rc1 a6 17 g4

After 17 Red1 (played with the idea of playing Bxf6 followed by Nd5), Black should continue 17 ... e6!? 18 a3 (White does win a pawn with 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Qxd6 but Black is fine after 19 ... b4 20 Nd5 exd5 21 Qxf6 dxe4 22 fxe4 Qb5 23 Rxc8+ Rxc8 24 Qf3 a5 and the extra pawn is of no practical value) 18 ... Rc6 19 Na2 Qxd2 20 Rxd2 Rxc1+ 21 Nxc1 and now Black holds the balance with 21 ... Ra8! 22 Ne2 (22 Bxf6 gets White nowhere after 22 ... Bxf6 23 Rxd6 Be5 24 Rc6 Bxh2) 22 ... Ne8 and the worst is definitely over for Black.

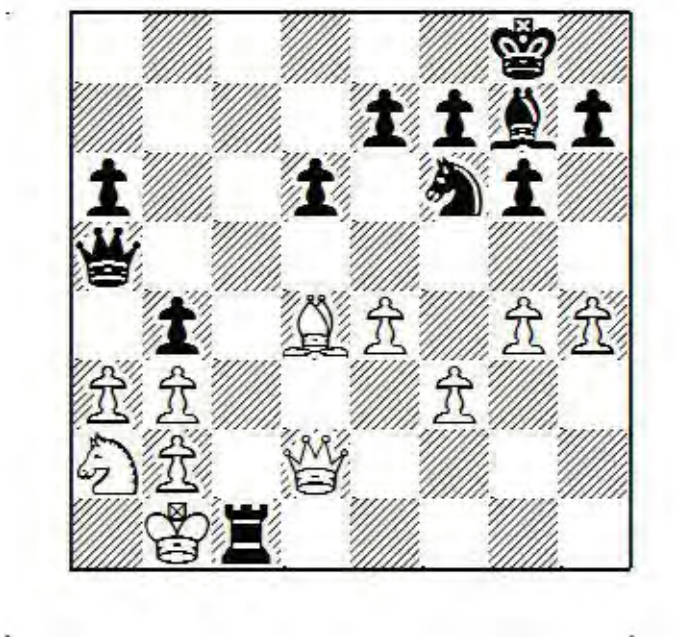
17 ... Rc6 18 h4 Rbc8 19 a3

With this move, White tries to dissuade Black from playing 19 ... b4, on account of 20 Na2, winning a pawn.

19 ... b4!

Playing it anyway! Black has accurately calculated that White cannot win the pawn in any satisfactory manner. The alternative, 19 ... h5 leaves White with the better chances after 20 b4 Qc7 21 gxh5 Nxh5 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 f4 and Black has very little play against White's king, whereas White is getting ready to use crowbars to crack Black's kingside pawn shield.

20 Na2 Rxc1+ 21 Rxc1 Rxc1+

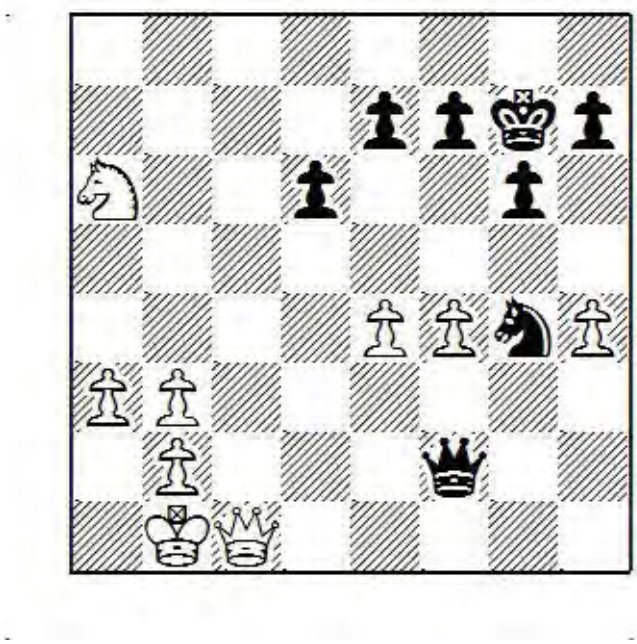


22 Nxc1

It would seem that 22 Kxc1!? would possibly be a better option for White on account of what happened in the game:

a) 22 ... Qc7+, while avoid losing a pawn, also causes Black to end up in a worse ending after 23 Qc2 Qxc2+ 24 Kxc2 bxa3 25 bxa3 when White's queenside pawn majority aided by his king leaves White with the better prospects.

b) However, the pawn sacrifice 22 ... Nd7!? leaves Black with adequate compensation for the pawn after 23 Bxg7 Qc5+ 24 Kb1 (or 24 Bc3 bxc3 25 Nxc3 Ne5 26 Qe2 Qg1+ 27 Kc2 Nc6, and Black is definitely not worse) 24 ... Kxg7 25 Nxb4 Ne5 26 Nxa6 Qg1+ 27 Qc1 Qf2 28 f4 Nxg4 with an interesting battle ahead.



Whose pawns are faster here?

22 ... h5 23 g5 Nd7 24 Bxg7

Or 24 axb4 Qb5 25 Bc3 Ne5 26 f4 Ng4 with mutual chances.

24 ... Kxg7 25 Nd3

Taking the pawn at this juncture does not present White with better chances. For instance, after 25 axb4 Qe5 26 Qf2 Qe6 27 Qe3 Qh3 28 Qd4+ Kg8 29 Qa7 Ne5 30 f4 Nd3, here White does best to force the draw with 31 Qxe7 Qh1 32 Qd8+ Kg7 33 Qf6+ Kg8 34 Qd8+ Kg7.

25 ... Ne5 26 Nxb4

Again, aside from leaving White with tripled b-pawns, White doesn't accomplish much by playing 26 axb4 26 Qb5 27 Nxe5 Qxe5 28 Qc3 f6 29 gxf6+ Qxf6 30 f4 Kf7 and despite being a pawn up, White doesn't have anything better than repeating the moves with 31 Qc4+ Kg7 32 Qc3 Kf7 33 Qc4+.

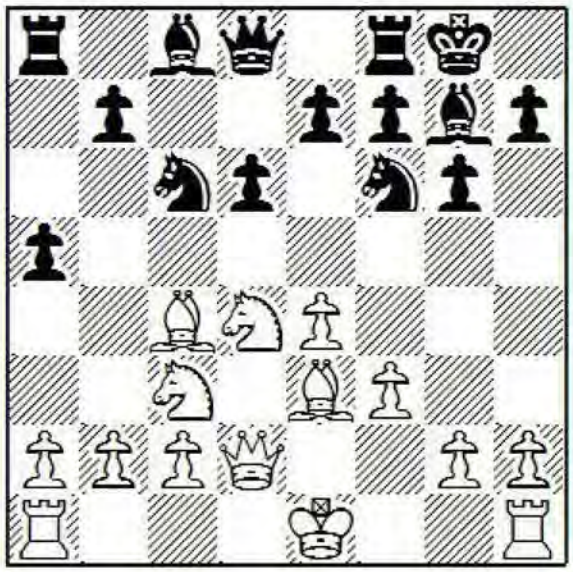
26 ... Nxf3 27 Qc3+ Ne5 28 Qc8 Nf3 29 Qc3+ Ne5 30 Qc8 Nf3 31 Qc3+ Ne5 ½-½

After the three-fold repetition, the players agreed to a draw.

Game 77
W.So-Li Chao
Manila 2007

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 a5

This is an idea of American International Master Donald Byrne. He played this move on several occasions, including against Karpov. The idea is to push the a-pawn forward to weaken White's queenside. If White then plays a2-a4, the Black will claim that the b4-square has been weakened. This is quite a rare guest in top tournament play, but perhaps not completely out of line as a surprise weapon.



10 h4

White has also tried castling headlong into the a-pawn rush or stopped its advance immediately:

a) 10 0-0-0 a4 (this makes White's light squared bishop feel a little less comfortable and offers up the possibility of ... a4-a3) 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 e5 (the only justification for White's last move although I don't feel that it is adequate) 12 ... Ne8 13 h4 (logically White opts for h-file action while the black king lacks defenders though his attack isn't quick enough to ignore the central action) 13 ... Qa5 (it's far from clear that 13 ... a3 14 b3 Bxe5 15 h5 Qa5 16 hxg6 Qxc3 17 gxf7+ Rxf7 18 Bxf7+ Kxf7 19 Rxh7+ Kf8 20 Bh6+ Ng7 is bad for Black either although for the vast majority of this game, it is difficult to criticise his play) 14 f4 (strangely White now has a change of heart, opting for this unimpressive move over the consistent 14 h5) 14 ... dxe5 (although the black c-pawn is now isolated, Black's knight has been gifted a very useful square) 15 a3 Bg4 (15 ... Nd6 16 Be2 exf4 17 Bxf4 Bxc3 also looks good) 16 Be2 Nf6 17 fxe5 occurred in R.Sluka-P.Jirovsky, Czech Team 2002. Here Ward recommends 17 ... Rfd8 18 Qe1 Qxe5 and Black is obviously better.

b) The natural response 10 a4 has been met with a few times with 10 ... Nxd4 (10 ... Bd7 11 Bb3 Qb8 12 0-0-0 Rc8 13 g4 Nb4 14 Kb1 Be8 15 h4 h5 16 Rdg1 e6 17 gxh5 Nxh5 18 f4 is clearly more promising for White, D.Svetushkin-A.Istratescu, Bucharest 1999) 11 Bxd4 Be6. A.Karpov-D.Bryne, San Antonio 1972 saw 12 Bb5 Rc8 13 0-0-0 Nd7 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 f4 Nf6 16 Rhe1 Qc7 and now, rather than 17 Qd4 as played by the future world champion (which could be met by 17 ... Qc5! with approximately even chances), White should have opted for 17 Kb1!? Rfd8 18 Qf2 Bc4 19 Bxc4 Qxc4 20 Rd4 Qc6 21 Qd2 and Black is left with a passive position and very little counterplay.

10 ... Ne5 11 Be2

The only correct move.

On the other hand, 11 Bb3? runs straight into trouble after 11 ... a4!, and now:

a) White got routed quickly after 12 Nxa4? Rxa4 13 Bxa4 Nc4 14 Qc3 Nxe3 15 Kf2? (15 Qxe3 Qa5+ is relatively better though it leaves Black with a clear material advantage) 15 ... Neg4+ 16 Ke2 Qb6 17 Rad1 e5 18 fxg4 exd4 19 Qxd4 Bxg4+ 20 Kf2 and White resigned in Z.Hlousek-J.Kolbak, Dresden 1969.

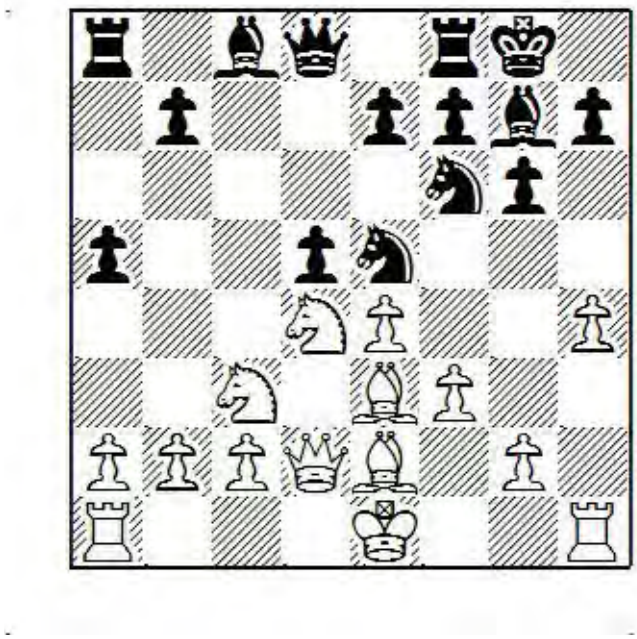
b) The other recapture 12 Bxa4 leaves White worse after 12 ... Nc4:

b1) 13 Qc1 d5!? 14 e5 Nh5 (14 ... Nxe5 is also perfectly good) 15 g4 Bxe5 16 gxh5 Qb6 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 Nxd5 Qd6 19 Bb3 Qxd5 20 Bxc4 Qxc4 with a strong initiative for Black.

b2) 13 Qe2 d5 14 e5?! Nh5 15 Rg1 Bxe5 16 g4 Nxe3 17 Qxe3 Bf4 18 Qd3 Bh2 19 Rh1 Bg3+ 20 Kf1 Nf4 21 Qd2 e5 22 Nde2 Nxe2 23 Nxe2 Bxh4 24 Qh6 g5 25 Ng3 Ra6 and White threw in the towel in A.Lokasto-I.Efimov, Moscow 1992. What's interesting is that Efimov lost

the same way with White against Zilberstein four years before this game and now reaped the benefits of the knowledge gleaned from the loss.

11 ... d5



Question: I know that ... d6-d5 is usually an achievement for Black in the Dragon. Here White has not yet castled, so has Black equalised now?

Answer: Good point, but things are rarely that simple in the Yugoslav Attack. Here Black has conceded a lot of weaknesses on the queenside and therefore, it is too early to tell whether he has equalised.

Black has also continued with the a-pawn march with 11 ... a4!? 12 a3 Qa5 (12 ... d5 13 exd5 Nxd5 14 0-0-0 Nxe3 15 Qxe3 Qa5 16 h5 Rd8 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 Kb1 leaves White with at most a slight advantage) 13 0-0-0 Bd7 as in J.Pletanek-M.Jirovsky, Czech Republic 2002. Now, instead of 14 Bh6?! as played in the game, White can consider 14 g4!? Rfc8 15 h5 Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 hxg6 fxg6 18 Kb1 Rac8 19 Nde2 with the better chances.

12 Ndb5

At the time of the game, this was a new move, but not a particularly convincing one. That being said, it is not easy to navigate all sorts of minor lines with great accuracy unless you have studied them in detail.

The alternatives (mainly from Donald Byrne's games) are:

a) 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 (13 0-0-0!? Nc6 14 Nxc6 bxc6 15 Bd4 looks promising for White) 13 ... Qxd5 14 h5 Nc4 15 Bxc4 Qxc4 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 b3 Qf7 18 Rd1 Rd8 19 Qc1 Bd7 and Black had no reason to complain about the outcome of the opening, H.Seidman-D.Byrne, New York 1961.

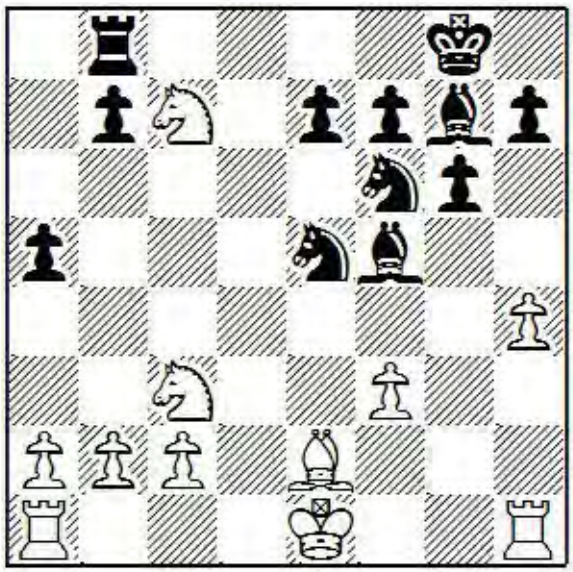
b) 12 f4 Nc4 13 Bxc4 dxc4 14 e5 Nd5 15 h5 Bg4 (15 ... Nxc3 16 Qxc3 was S.From-J.Kolbak, Randers 1970, and now 16 ... Qd5 17 0-0-0 Bg4 is probably Black's best chance and seems quite playable) 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 Rh4 Nxe3 18 Qxe3 Qd7 19 Ne4 was played in S.Reshevsky-D.Byrne, New York 1966, and here Black could have reached a good position with 19 ... Rad8 20 c3 b5.

c) 12 Bf4 Nc4?! (12 ... Nc6!? is also possible, for instance 13 0-0-0 e5 14 Nxc6 bxc6 15 Bg5 d4 16 h5 Qc7 with an unclear position where both sides can play for the initiative) 13 Bxc4 dxc4 14 0-0-0 e5 15 Bxe5?! (15 Ndb5! is stronger) 15 ... Nxe4 16 Qf4 Nxc3 17 Bxg7 (17 bxc3 Bxe5 18 Qxe5 Qe8 19 Qxe8 Rxe8 is better for White because Black will have difficulties finding a useful square for the bishop, whereas the knight reigns comfortably in the centre) 17 ... Kxg7 18 bxc3 Qf6 19 Qc7 and White has a steady initiative thanks to Black's awkward piece coordination, R.Fischer-D.Byrne, Bay City 1963.

12 ... Be6

Black can also consider 12 ... dxe4 which leads to an exchange sacrifice after 13 Qxd8 Rxd8 14 Nc7

Rb8 15 Ba7 exf3 16 gxf3 Bf5 17 Bxb8 Rxb8.



Black has decent compensation on the account of his bishop pair and active pieces.

13 Bf4 Nh5 14 exd5 Nxf4 15 Qxf4 Bxd5 16 0-0-0 e6 17 h5

Another possibility for White is to play 17 Nxd5 exd5 first and then play 18 h5 Rc8 19 c3 Re8 20 Kb1 Qd7 with a slight advantage.

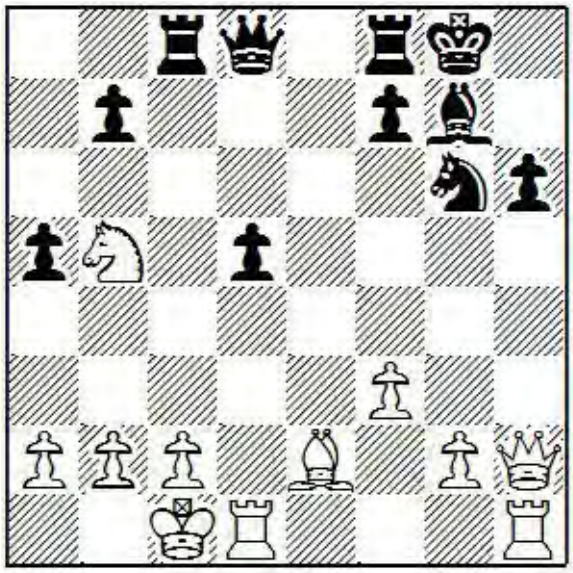
17 ... Rc8 18 hxg6

Instead, 18 Nxd5 transposes to the line given in the previous note. Now the nature of the game changes considerably.

18 ... Nxg6!

The idea behind this capture (instead of 18 ... fxg6) is that after 19 Qe3, Black has 19 ... Qf6 and White has no time to capture on d5 since the b2-pawn is vulnerable. On the other hand, after 18 ... fxg6, White has 19 Qe3 Qf6 20 Nxd5 exd5 21 c3, keeping a central grip.

19 Qh2 h6 20 Nxd5 exd5



Question: It seems like Black has five pawn weaknesses while White has none. White is clearly better, right?

Answer: Compared to the alternative we looked at in the previous note, Black is now doing a lot better. Even though Black's pawn structure is absolutely rubbish, it leaves him room to actively pursue the initiative. White, on the other hand, has lost his momentum and his pieces look very uncoordinated.

21 Kb1 Qb6

Also worth considering is 21 ... Re8!?.

22 Rxd5

My computer recommends 22 c3 Rfe8 23 g3 which has the benefit of being relatively solid, but I would rather play Black.

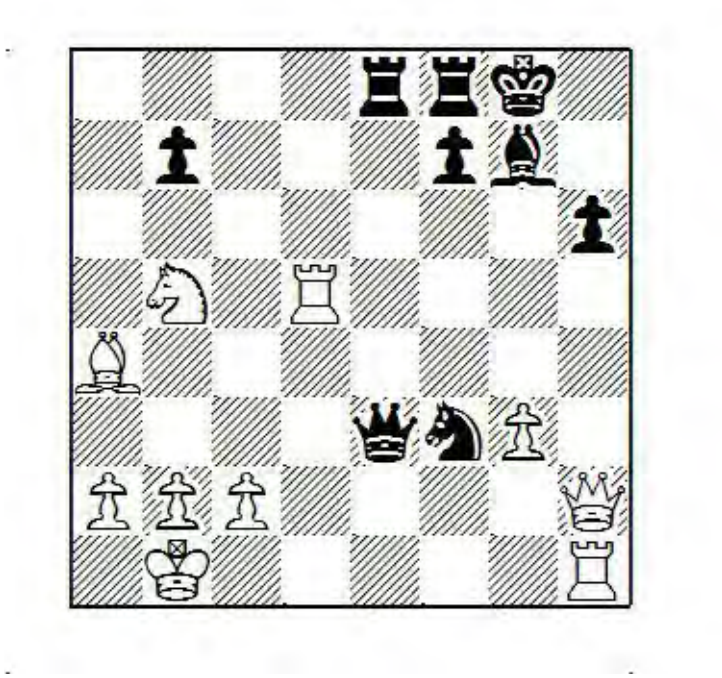
22 ... Qe3

If Black was satisfied with a draw, then 22 ... Qe6 would work as after 23 Rd2 Rfd8 24 Rxd8+ Rxd8 25 Bd3 (25 g4 Qc6 leaves Black with the initiative and excellent compensation for the pawn) 25 ... Rxd3 26 cxd3 Qe2 27 Nc3 Qxd3+ 28 Ka1 Bxc3 29 bxc3 Qxc3+, a draw by perpetual check is reached.

23 g3 Rce8 24 Bc4?!

If only White was able to defend like a computer, he could have found 24 Bd1!? Rd8 25 Rxd8 Rxd8 26 a4!? Rd2 27 Qg1 Qe5, and now comes the stunning. 28 Kc1! Qd5 29 Qf1 and White can start consolidating. But few humans can defend in this fashion.

24 ... Ne5 25 Bb3 a4 26 Bxa4 Nxf3



27 Qh5?!

Here, White could have opted for a repetition of moves with 27 Qg2!? Ne1 28 Qh2 Nf3 29 Qg2 Ne1 but instead taking the draw, White could consider 30 Qd2!? Qf3 31 Rdh5 Re2 32 Qd5 Qe3 with a messy position which my engine claims to be better for White, but my take is that things are far from clear.

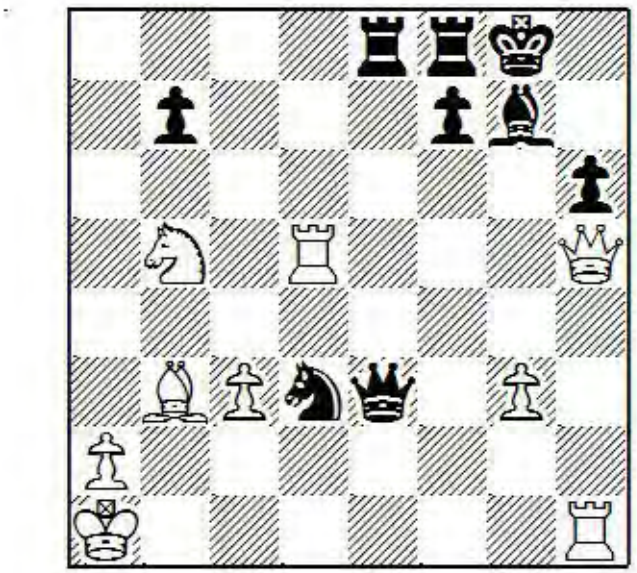
27 ... Nd2+ 28 Ka1 Nc4

Now, however, there is no doubt that Black has the initiative.

29 Bb3?

Having gone wrong once, White now quickly continues making further mistakes. The lesser evil is 29 Rd3 Qb6 30 c3 Re5 31 Qd1 Rxb5 32 Bxb5 Qxb5 33 Rh2 Bf6!? and while Black is definitely better, White is by no means lost.

29 ... Nxb2 30 c3 Nd3

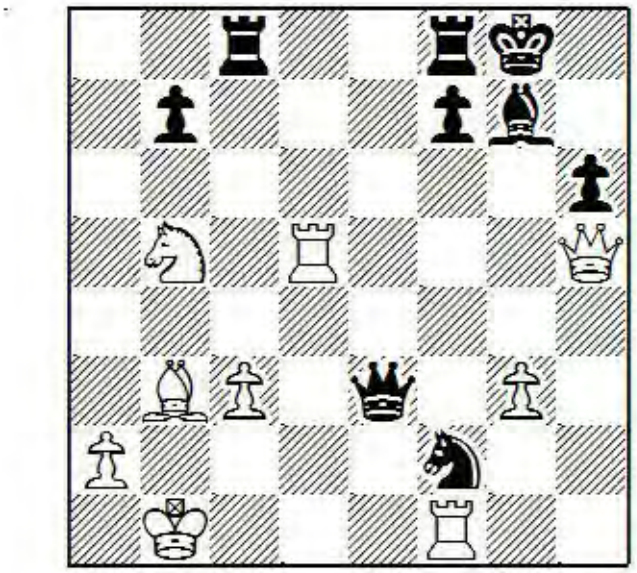


Black sets up the dual threat of ... Qd2 and ... Nf2. This proved too much for White to bear.

31 Rd1?

After this move White's problems escalates further because Black's pieces get even better placed for the continued onslaught against White's pawn shield on the queenside. Instead, more resilient is 31 Bc2 Ne1 32 Rh2 Nxc2+ 33 Rxc2 Qxg3 though Black retains winning chances.

31 ... Nf2 32 Rf1 Rc8 33 Kb1



33 ... Ne4!?

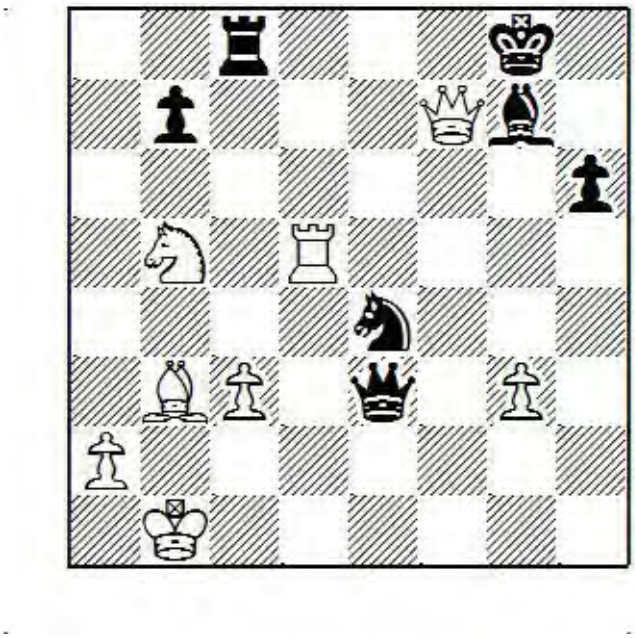
Centralising the knight to threatening mayhem on both c3 and d2. This looks like the most logical and best continuation. However, Black can play even better with 33 ... Rxc3!, exposing the white king. White can do no better than 34 Nxc3 Qxc3 35 Rxf2 Qe1+ 36 Qd1 Qxf2 37 Qc1 Qxg3 and Black is up two pawns while White's king will continue to be in peril.

34 Rxf7?!

Strictly speaking, this is a terrible move, but in the heat of the battle it was played to throw Black off his plan to terminate the game. Considering the previous action in the game, the players could easily have found themselves in time trouble at this stage of the game. Objectively speaking, White should have opted for 34 Qf3, but even then Black should be winning after 34 ... Nd2+ 35 Rxd2 Qxd2 36 Rd1 Qg5 and

Black is up an exchange for no compensation.

34 ... Rxf7 35 Qxf7+



35 ... Kh8!

Avoiding White's last trick. After 35 ... Kxf7??, White saves himself with 36 Rd3+ Kg6 37 Rxe3 Nxc3+ 38 Nxc3 Rxc3 39 Rxc3 Bxc3 40 g4 and we have a very drawn endgame on our hands. After the text move, Black's attack is unstoppable.

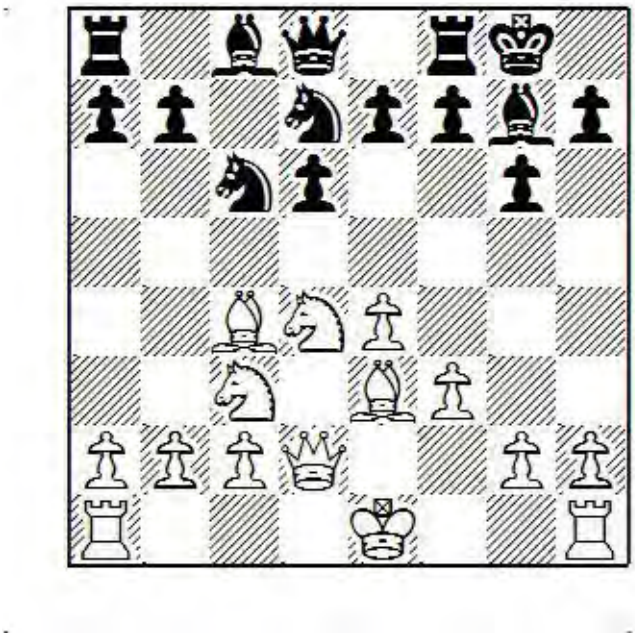
36 Qd7

It is also game over after 36 Rd7 Nxc3+ 37 Nxc3 Qxc3.

36 ... Nxc3+ 37 Kc2 Rf8 38 Rd2 Nxb5 39 Qxb5 Qc3+ 40 Kd1 Qa1+ 41 Kc2 Qb2+ 0-1

Game 78
A.Volokitin-S.Tiviakov
Russian Team Championships, Sochi 2007

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bc4 d6 8 f3 0-0 9 Qd2 Nd7



Question: This is a curious-looking move. Why does Black make this strange retreat when he has neither completed development nor issue a threat with this move?

Answer: That is a very good question. In general, the knight is heading for the c4-square or gunning for the light-squared bishop after ... Nb6 and ... Na5. The knight manoeuvre also frees up the Dragon bishop's diagonal. In any case, the answer to which will become apparent in the next couple of moves.

10 Bb3

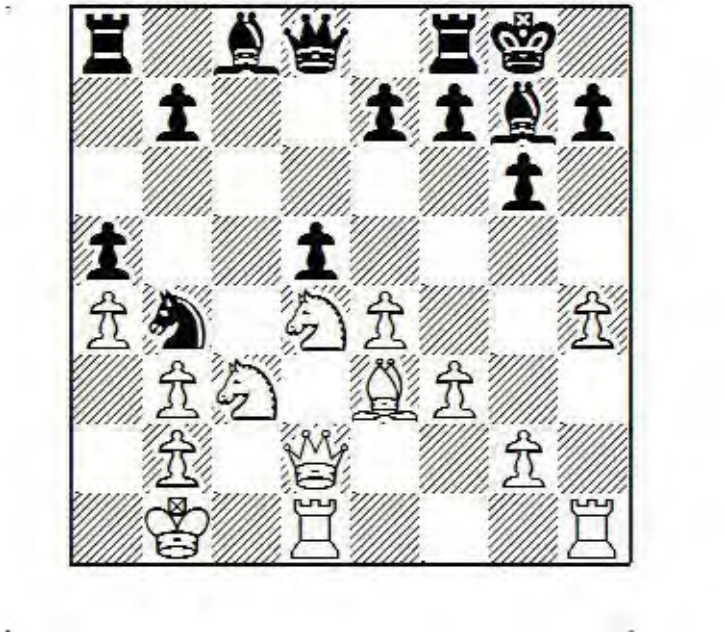
This is the most precise move order. Nevertheless, White often castles queenside at this juncture, which is definitely premature, mainly because he can save it for later advantageously.

After 10 0-0-0 Nb6 11 Bb3 Na5, we should look at White's main options:

a) 12 Qe2 Nxb3+ 13 axb3 a5 14 Ndb5 Bd7 15 Na4 Nxa4 16 bxa4, A.Sznapik-Ki.Georgiev, Haifa 1989, and now 16 ... Rc8 17 h4 Bxb5 (or even 17 ... h5) 18 Qxb5 Qc7 19 Qb3 Qc4 is about equal.

b) 12 Qd3 and now:

b1) 12 ... Nxb3+ 13 cxb3 (13 axb3 a5 looks like a good version for Black of what we will be looking at below) 13 ... a5 (13 ... d5!? 14 Nde2 Qc7 15 Kb1 dxe4 16 fxe4 Bg4 17 h3 Rfd8 18 Qc2 Bd7 19 Rd2 Be8 20 Rhd1 Rxd2 21 Qxd2 Bc6 is quite comfortable for Black due to his bishop pair and better pawns, S.Ernst-L.Riemersma, Enschede 1995) 14 a4 (14 Nde2 a4 15 Qb5 Ra6 16 Bxb6 Rxb6 17 Qxa4 Ra6 promises Black excellent compensation for the pawn, S.Zawadzki-E.Brestian, Czech Republic 2001) 14 ... Nd7!? (another knight move with the idea of ... Nc5 and possibly even a future ... Nb4) 15 Kb1 Nc5 16 Qc2 Na6 17 h4 Nb4 18 Qd2 d5, A.Novita-R.Mamedov, Dubai 2004.



Question: How should White meet this central thrust in order to gain the advantage?

Answer: White could have played 19 Nxd5 Nxd5 and then follow up with the elegant zwischenzug 20 Nb5! e6 21 exd5 exd5 22 Bd4 where he certainly has the better chances since Black's central and queenside activity has been stymied.

b2) 12 ... Bd7 13 h4 (13 Kb1 Rc8 14 g4 Nac4 15 h4 Ne5 16 Qe2, A.Shirov-S.Tiviakov, Dos Hermanas 2003, and now for some reason the famous Dragon player failed to play the automatic Dragon move 16 ... Rxc3! 17 bxc3 Qc7 which leads to interesting play with chances to both sides) 13 ... Rc8 (13 ... Nxb3+ 14 cxb3 Rc8 15 Kb1 f5 16 h5 fxe4 17 fxe4 Qe8 18 Ndb5 Bxc3 19 Nxc3 gxh5 20 Rdf1 Qg6 21 Bxb6 axb6 is rather unclear, but probably okay for Black, L.Perez Rodriguez-F.Corrales Jimenez, Ciego de Avila 2010) 14 h5 Nbc4 15 hxg6. fxg6 (15 ... hxg6?! is met by 16 Bg5! which ties Black down considerably and after 16 ... Nxb3+ 17 cxb3 Qa5 18 Bxe7 Ne5 19 Qc2 Rxc3 20 bxc3 Rc8 21 Kb2 Qb6, which was played in T.Wedberg-G.Sosonko, Haninge 1988, now White could have consolidated his advantage with 22 Kb1 Nc4 23 Qc1) 16 Kb1 (16 Bg5 is met by 16 ... Nxb3+ 17 cxb3 Ne5 18 Qd2 Nf7

with a slight edge for White) 16 ... Nxb3 17 axb3 Nxe3 18 Qxe3 a6 19 f4 Rf7 20 e5 Bg4 21 Nf3 Qf8 22 Ng5 dxe5 23 Nxf7 exf4 24 Qe4 Qxf7 25 Qxb7 and White should be better, though the bishops may cause him some headaches, G.Gopal-F.Corrales Jimenez, Yerevan 2007.

c) White should at all cost avoid 12 Bh6? Nbc4 13 Qg5 e5! 14 Ndb5 a6! 15 Na3 Bf6 and White loses at least a piece.

10 ... Nb6 11 h4!?

White's most aggressive choice. Other tries include:

a) 11 Nd5 Nxd5 12 Bxd5 (or 12 exd5 Nxd4 13 Bxd4 Bxd4 14 Qxd4 Qa5+ 15 c3 e5 16 dxe6 Bxe6 17 0-0 Bxb3 18 axb3 Qc5 and Black has equalised, A.Naumann-E.Brestian, Linz 2000) 12 ... Qc7 13 0-0-0 Bd7 14 h4 Rfc8 15 Nb5 Qa5 16 Qxa5 Nxa5 17 Nxa7 Re8 18 b4 and here a draw was prematurely agreed in A.Pashikian-R.Mamedov, Lahijan 2005.

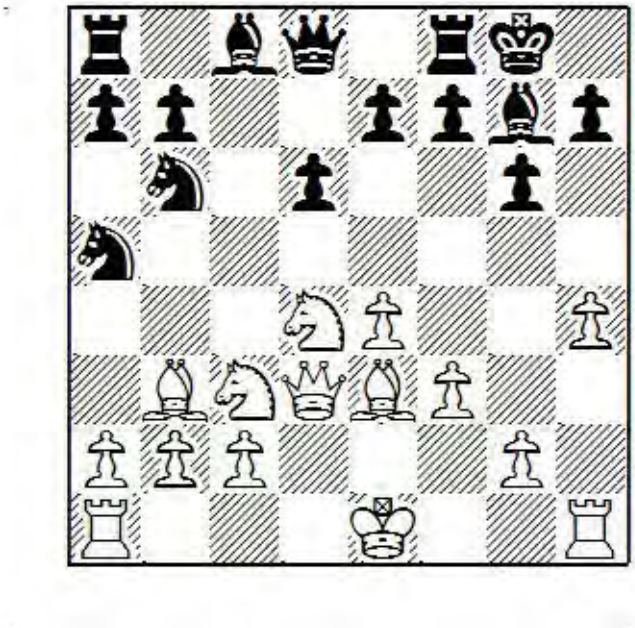
b) 11 0-0-0 can often lead to transpositions to other lines but an independent continuation occurred after 11 ... Na5 12 Bg5 (12 Qd3 would likely transpose to some of the lines below) 12 ... Bd7 (12 ... h6!? intending 13 Bxh6? Nbc4 14 Bxc4 Nxc4 15 Qg5 e5! is cheekily suggested by my computer!) 13 Kb1 Rc8 14 Qe1 h6 15 Bc1 Nbc4 16 f4 e5 17 fxe5 Nxb3 18 cxb3 Nxe5 19 Ndb5 Bxb5 20 Nxb5 Qb6 21 Qe2 a6 22 Nc3 Rfe8 and chances are roughly equal as both sides have a weak central pawn, S.Sulskis-S.Tiviakov, Catalan Bay 2003.

11 ... Na5

Question: Okay, I get it, this is the idea behind the strange knight moves. Black threatens to jump to c4, eliminating at least one of White's bishops. Does he honestly have time for this?

Answer: Another good question! It is a very time-consuming manoeuvre and theoretically, this line is at best problematic for Black. So the answer is possibly no, but the jury does not unanimously agree with the verdict.

12 Qd3!



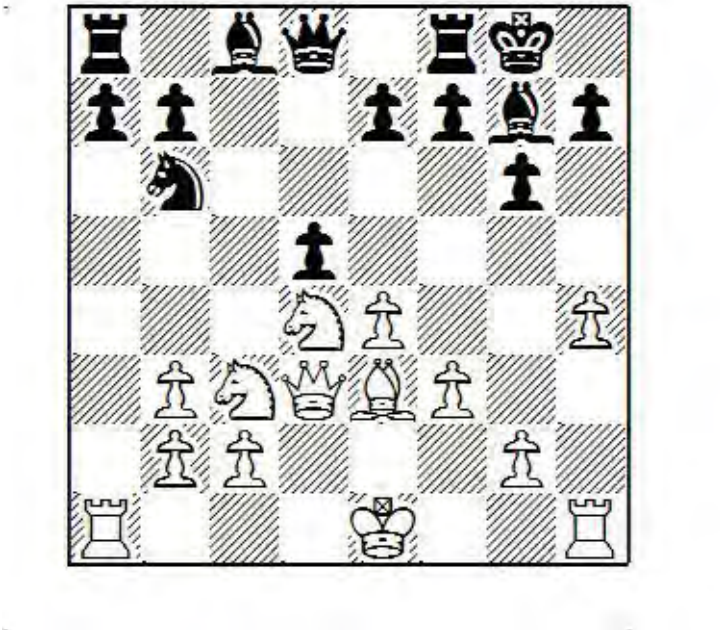
White should not allow Black the opportunity the exchange a knight for the dark-squared bishop on e3, which was what happened in the following two alternatives:

a) 12 h5 Nbc4 13 Qe2 Nxb3 14 axb3 Nxe3 15 Qxe3 Bd7 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 0-0-0 Qa5 18 Kb1 Rac8 19 b4 Qd8 20 e5 Bxe5 21 Ne4 e6 22 g3 Qc7 23 Rd2 Rce8 24 f4 Bg7 and Black is doing fine at this point, even if White eventually managed to win the game, M.Bartel-I.Teran Alvarez, Evora 2007.

b) 12 Qe2 Nxb3 13 axb3 d5 14 exd5 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 16 0-0-0 Qa5 17 Kb1 Bd7 18 h5 e5 19 b4 Qa4 20 Nb3 Be6 21 hxg6 fxg6 22 Bc5 Rfe8 with a good game for Black, E.Paehtz-M.Rudnicki, Warsaw 2009.

12 ... Bd7

Another approach for Black is 12 ... Nxb3 13 axb3 and now to break in the centre with 13 ... d5.



Black intends to meet 14 0-0-0 with 14 ... e5 with ... d5-d4 to follow. White has met this adequately in a couple of ways:

a) 14 Ndb5 a6 15 Bxb6 Qxb6 16 Nxd5 Qd8 17 Ndc3 (17 Nbc3 e6 18 Ne3 Qxd3 19 cxd3 Rb8 with equal chances) 17 ... Bd7 (17 ... Rb8!? 18 Na3 b5 looks good for Black) 18 Nd4 Qb6 19 0-0-0 Rfd8 20 Nd5 Qd6 21 Qe3, M.Casella-A.Kosteniuk, Connecticut 2003, and now 21 ... e6 would lead to a fairly even game.

b) 14 Nde2 was played in a couple of games by the Bulgarian Dragon expert, Kiril Georgiev: 14 ... Be6 (14 ... dxe4?? 15 Qxd8 Rxd8 16 Bxb6 and White is winning) 15 0-0-0 dxe4 16 Qxe4 Qc7 17 h5 (17 Nd4 Bd7 18 h5 Qe5 didn't accomplish much for White, L.Ljubojevic-Ki.Georgiev, Manila 1990) 17 ... Qe5 18 Qxe5 Bxe5 19 Nf4 Bxf4 20 Bxf4 Rac8 21 Rde1 Nd5 22 Nxd5 Bxd5 23 Rxe7 Bxb3 24 c3 b5 25 hxg6 hxg6 26 Be5 f6 27 Bd4 with a somewhat unpleasant endgame for Black, F.Nijboer-Ki.Georgiev, Groningen 1993.

13 h5 Nxb3

Question: You must be joking! Black spends all that time to set up a knight foray on c4, and then he does not do it anyway! That cannot be right?

Answer: This is the modern interpretation of this variation. Rather than cling on to the dream of playing a knight to c4, Black switches horses – pun intended – and prises open the a-file instead.

That being said, if Black wants to play for this type of position (playing ... Na5 and then exchange on b3), then he should look into the lines covered in our next main game, where Black does not spend the extra time by transferring the knight from f6 to b6.

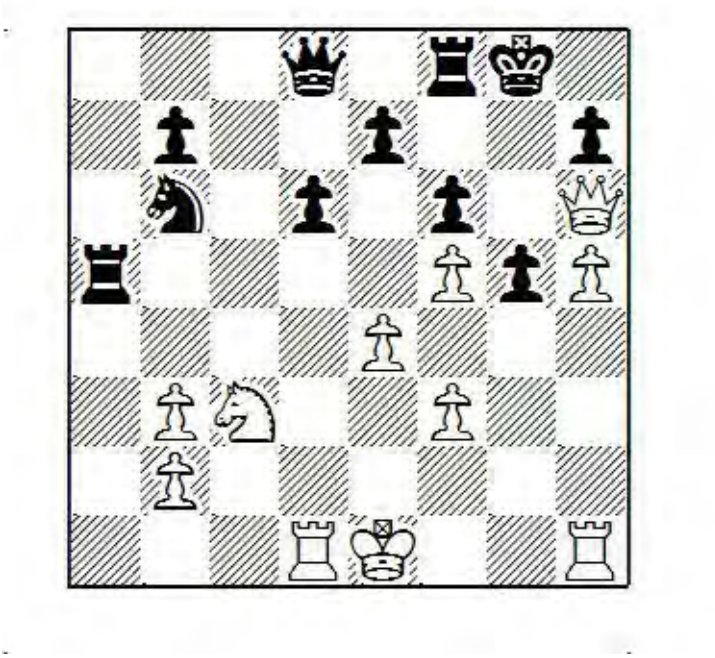
The old-fashioned way of playing, 13 ... Rc8, should not be completely invalidated. For instance, after 14 hxg6 hxg6 15 0-0-0 Nbc4 16 Bh6 e5 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 Ndb5 (18 Nde2!? is likely better) 18 ... Bxb5 19 Nxb5 a6 20 Nc3 Qg5+ 21 Kb1 Qxg2 22 Nd5 was played in K.van der Weide-M.Golubev, Bethune 2003, and here Black should probably have given preference to 22 ... Rc5 23 Rhg1 Qf2 with approximately equal chances.

14 axb3 a5 15 hxg6

Two interesting options are:

a) 15 Qd2 a4 16 Rd1 axb3 17 cxb3 Ra5 18 Bh6 Bxh6 19 Qxh6 g5 20 g4? (instead, 20 b4 Re5 21 0-0

f6 22 f4 gxf4 23 Rxf4 would lead to a complicated position with chances to both sides) 20 ... f6 21 Nf5 Bxf5 22 gxf5, A.Czebe-M.Zupe, Budapest 1995.



Now Black should simply have played 22 ... Nd7 with both ... Ne5-f7 and ... Qb6-e3 looming. White is practically playing a queen down.

b) 15 Ndb5!? Bc6 (my computer suggests the artificial-looking 15 ... a4 16 bxa4 Nxa4 17 Nxa4 Qa5+ 18 Nbc3 Bxa4 19 Kf2 Bxc3 20 bxc3 g5, but after 21 Rhb1, Black cannot be happy with the outcome of the opening) 16 0-0-0 a4 17 hxg6 fxg6 (17 ... hxg6 18 b4 Bxb5 19 Nxb5 Rc8 20 Bd4 is a better choice for Black, but nevertheless still better for White) 18 bxa4 Rf7 19 b3 Nd7 20 Bd4 Ne5 21 Qd2 and Black is a pawn down without anything near adequate compensation, Y.Solodovnichenko-E.Messina, Napoli 2005.

15 ... fxg6 16 Bh6

A logical continuation as exchanging the dark-squared bishops in the Dragon is often a good idea in order to weaken both Black's defensive and aggressive resources.

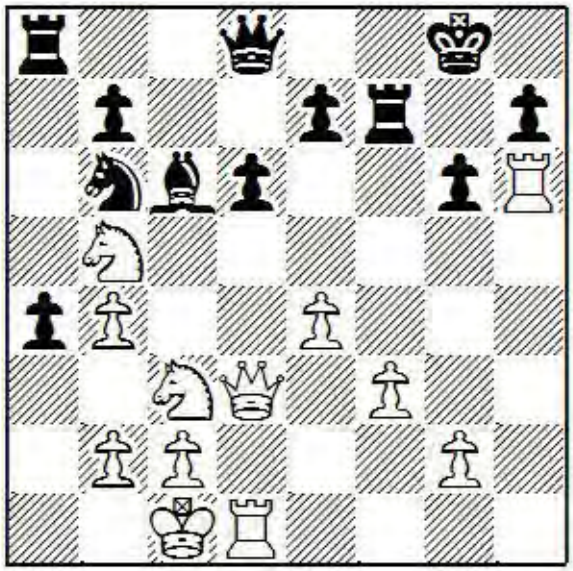
Two alternatives are:

a) 16 Na4 Nxa4 17 bxa4 Rf7 18 Qb3 Qe8 19 c3 (after 19 Qxb7, Chris Ward gives line 19 ... Rb8 20 Qa7 Rxb2 21 Qxa5 Bxd4 22 Bxd4 Rxc2 which he considers unproblematic for Black, but I do feel that White has the slightly better chances after something like 23 0-0) 19 ... Be5 (19 ... Rb8!?, intending ... b7-b5 looks worthwhile as well) 20 Ne6 Bxe6 21 Qxe6 Kf8 (21 ... Qc8 22 Qxc8+ Rxc8 23 Bb6 Ra8 is suggested by Ward as well, but this looks distinctly better for White after 24 Ra3! followed by Rb3 as White's pawn structure is far better than Black's) 22 f4 Bh8 23 f5 gxf5 24 exf5 Qc6 was V.Tseshkovsky-S.Tiviakov, Krasnoyarsk 2003, and now White would have kept the better chances with 25 0-0 Be5 26 Rf3 as Black's position is a pretty mess.

b) 16 Nde2 Rf7 17 Bd4 Bxd4 18 Qxd4 Bc6 (18 ... Qc7 19 0-0-0 a4 20 bxa4 Bxa4 21 b3 Be8 22 Kb2 Qc5 23 Qxc5 dxc5 24 Ra1 is definitely more comfortable for White as Black's pieces are very oddly coordinated, N.Fercec-I.Ivankovic, Pula 1998) 19 Na4?! (19 e5!? dxe5 20 Qxd8+ Rxd8 21 Rxa5 looks better for White thanks to his better pawn structure) 19 ... Nd7 20 c4 Ne5 21 Qc3 b5 22 cxb5 Bxb5 23 Nc1? Rc8 and White is in a world of trouble, R.Tancsa-A.Gemesi, Hajduboszormeny 1995.

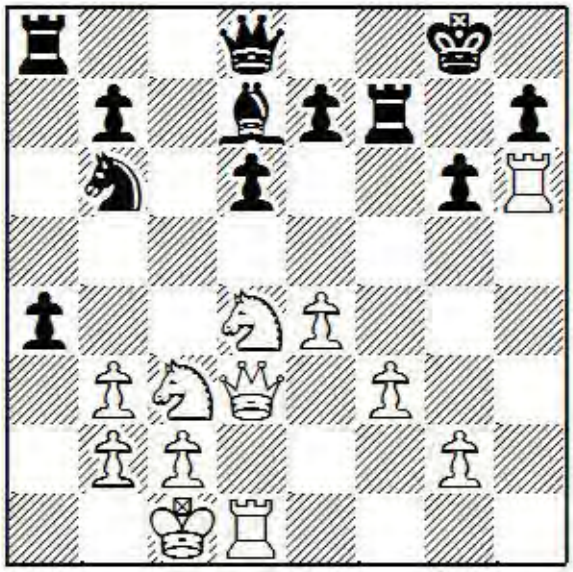
16 ... Bxh6 17 Rxh6 Rf7 18 0-0-0

The pointless-looking 18 Ndb5 (this has also been recommended by my computer) has been played with something interesting in mind after 18 ... Bc6 19 0-0-0 a4 20 b4!?.



Now the knight stops Black from playing ... a4-a3 and with that, some of the wind in the sails of Black's attack is gone. After 20 ... Nd7 (20 ... Bxb5 21 Nxb5 Qd7 22 Na3 Rc8 looks like a better choice for Black, although White cannot be worse) 21 Na3 Ne5 22 Qd4, White has the better chances, R.Akopian-W.Bermudez Adams, Miami 2007.

18 ... a4



19 e5!?

This looks fierce, but it is simply forcing simplifications.

The alternative is 19 Kb1, which leads to an unclear position after 19 ... Qc8 20 Rdh1 Qc5 21 bxa4 Nxa4 22 Nd5.

19 ... Qf8! 20 Rdh1 dxe5 21 Qxg6+ Qg7

Of course not 21 ... hxg6??, which allows a pretty mate after 22 Rh8+ Kg7 23 R1h7+ Kf6 24 Ne4.

22 Qxg7+ ½-½

A truce was agreed here, although it is far from clear that a draw would be the logical outcome, for instance after 22 Qxg7+ Rxg7 23 Rxb6 exd4 24 Nxa4 Rxg2 25 Rxb7 Bf5 26 Rc7 Kf7 and Black has a distinct initiative in the endgame. The material and pawn structure imbalances make it difficult to make a firm evaluation.

V.Anand-Ki.Georgiev
Belgrade 1997

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Bc4 Bd7

In this game, we will look at the lines where Black plays ... Na5 either on the 9th or 10th move and where it does not transpose to other lines. In fact there are many transpositions available, both to lines normal main lines where Black plays ... Rc8 followed by ... Nc4, but there are also chances of it ending up in a sideline of the Chinese Dragon, which we discussed in the previous chapter.

a) First let us take a look at the immediate 9 ... Na5 which will typically transpose to the lines after 10 ... Na5, but there are some independent examples:

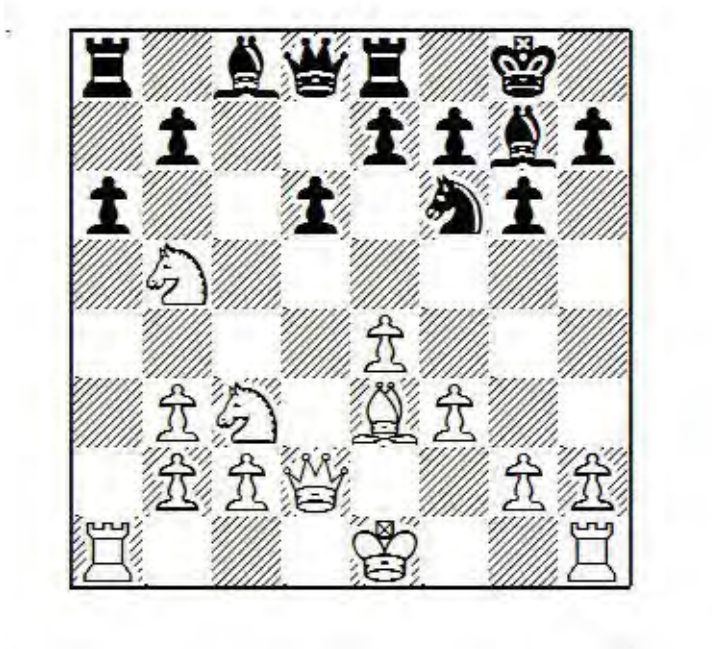
a1) 10 Be2 is similar to Anand's choice in our main game. Now Black has the choice of playing normally (with 10 ... Bd7 followed by 11 ... Rc8 and ... Nc4) or go independent via 10 ... a6 11 0-0-0 (11 b4 is not as stupid as it looks, but nevertheless Black is fine after 11 ... Nc6 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 0-0 Be6) 11 ... b5 12 Bh6?! (after this, Black can grab the initiative with accurate play so both 12 g4 and 12 Kb1 make good sense instead) 12 ... Bb7?! (12 ... Bxh6! 13 Qxh6 e5 14 Nb3 Be6 is definitely the way to go for Black) 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 h4 (14 e5! Nd7 15 e6 Ne5 16 exf7 Qc8 17 Qg5 Nac6 18 Qe3 and White is firmly in control of the game) 14 ... e5 15 Nb3 Nc4 16 Bxc4 bxc4 17 Na1 d5 18 exd5 Qb6 19 Qe2 Qc7 20 Rhe1 Rfe8 with a complicated position with chances to both sides, S.Movsesian-A.Fedorov, Las Vegas 1999.

a2) 10 Bb3 Nxb3 (White can also delay the exchange on b3 with 10 ... Bd7 11 Bh6 (or 11 h4 h5 12 0-0-0 Nxb3+ 13 axb3 Qa5 14 Kb1 Rfc8 15 Bh6 Bh8 16 g4 Rc5 17 gxh5 Nxh5 18 Bg5 e6 is an almost normal Dragon position with even chances, Lu Shanglei-V.Bologan, Dubai 2014) 11 ... Nxb3 12 axb3 Bxh6! 13 Qxh6 e5 14 Nde2 b5 15 Rd1?! b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 Rxd5 Be6 18 Rd2 Qb6 19 Qh4 Rfc8 when Black held the initiative and eventually ground down his higher rated opponent, E.Inarkiev-I.Salgado Lopez, Dubai 2014) with three choices of recaptures for White:

a21) 11 cxb3 Bd7 12 h4 h5 13 0-0-0 b5 14 Ndxb5 Qb8 15 Nd4 a5 16 Bh6?! (16 a4!? Rc8 17 Kb1 Qb7 is pretty unclear, but at least White has stopped Black from opening more files in the direction of the white king) 16 ... Bxh6 17 Qxh6 a4 18 bxa4 Rc8 19 Qe3 Bxa4 and Black's initiative easily compensates for the missing pawn, but probably no more than that, S.Karjakin-I.Salgado Lopez, Tromso 2014.

a22) 11 Nxb3 Be6 12 Bh6 Bxb3 13 cxb3 Bxh6 14 Qxh6 Qa5 15 0-0-0 Rfc8 16 Kb1 was played in G.Ardelean-G.Grecescu, Eforie Nord 2008, and now I like the centralising 16 ... Qe5 17 h4 Rc5 best. Chances are probably about even.

a23) 11 axb3 Re8 (11 ... d5 12 e5 Ne8 13 f4 f6 was A.Martin Gonzalez-S.Del Rio de Angelis, Barcelona 2000 and here, 14 Nf3 maintains a grip for White) 12 Ndb5 a6 was seen in J.Friedel-A.Motylev, Minneapolis 2005.

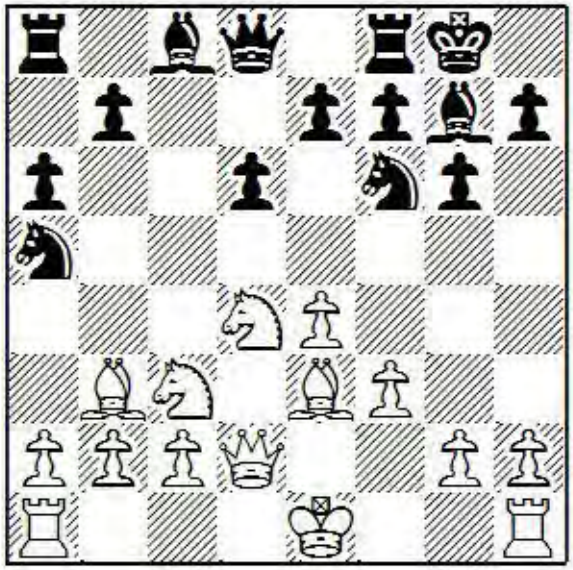


Question: Isn't 13 e5 dxe5 Qxd8 14 Rxd8 Qxd8 15 Nc7 Rb8 16 Ba7 better for White since it wins the exchange?

Answer: Black isn't worried about that as 16 ... Bh3! 17 Bxb8 (17 gxh3 Rbc8 is all right for Black too) 17 ... Bxg2 18 Rg1 Bxf3 has Black on material parity anyway with good chances.

Instead, the game went 13 Qf2 Bd7 14 Nd4 b5 15 0-0 e5 16 Nde2 b4 17 Na4 d5 18 Bb6 Qb8 19 exd5 Nxd5 20 Rfd1 Bc6 21 Bc5 e4 22 fxe4 Rxe4 and Black's pieces are playing wonderfully together, while their white counterparts are leaving a more disjointed impression.

b) We also have a slightly different version with 9 ... a6 10 Bb3 Na5:

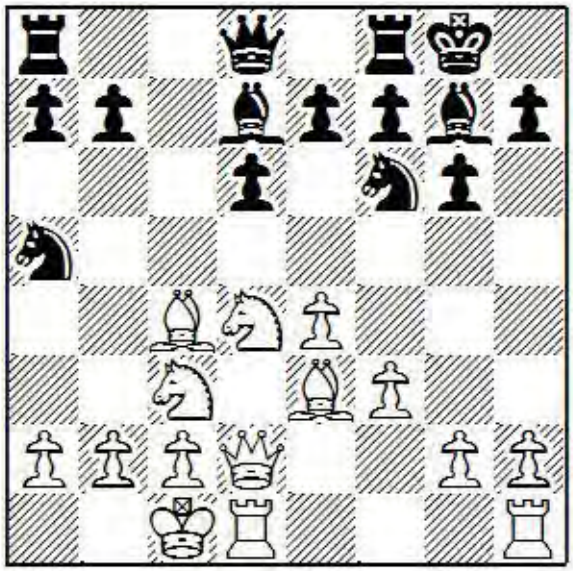


b1) 11 Nde2 b5 12 0-0 Bd7 13 Bh6 Bxh6 14 Qxh6 b4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 exd5 Qb6+ 17 Kh1 Rac8 and Black certainly had nothing to worry about, Z.Lanka-M.Ivanov, Leutersdorf 2001.

b2) 11 Bh6 Bxh6 12 Qxh6 e5 13 Nde2 b5 14 Qd2 b4 (14 ... Nxb3!? 15 axb3 b4 16 Na2 d5 is also worth looking into) 15 Na4 Nxb3 16 axb3 a5 17 0-0-0 Ra6 and Black had every reason to be happy with the outcome of the opening, Hou Yifan-H.Nakamura, Wijk aan Zee 2013.

b3) 11 g4 b5 12 h4 e5 13 Nde2 Bb7 (Black can improve with 13 ... Nxb3 14 axb3 d5 15 exd5 b4) 16 Ne4 Nxe4 17 fxe4 Bxg4 with a very unclear position) 14 0-0-0 Nxb3+ 15 axb3 was better for White in B.Savchenko-V.Belous, Moscow 2013.

10 0-0-0 Na5



This is still a relatively rare line, but it is seen more and more frequently. In particular, the Chinese grandmaster Bu Xiangzhi has used it a lot.

11 Be2!?

Question: This passive move must be a mistake right? Surely the bishop does not belong on e2 in the Yugoslav Attack, does it?

Answer: This is in itself not a particularly threatening move, nor is it attempting to be a refutation of Black's move order. It does, however, encourage Black to return to the main lines with 11 ... Rc8 followed by ... Nc4. Provided Black is not interested in that, then it takes away some options for Black, mainly the possibility of exchanging the knight on b3, which has become somewhat trendy.

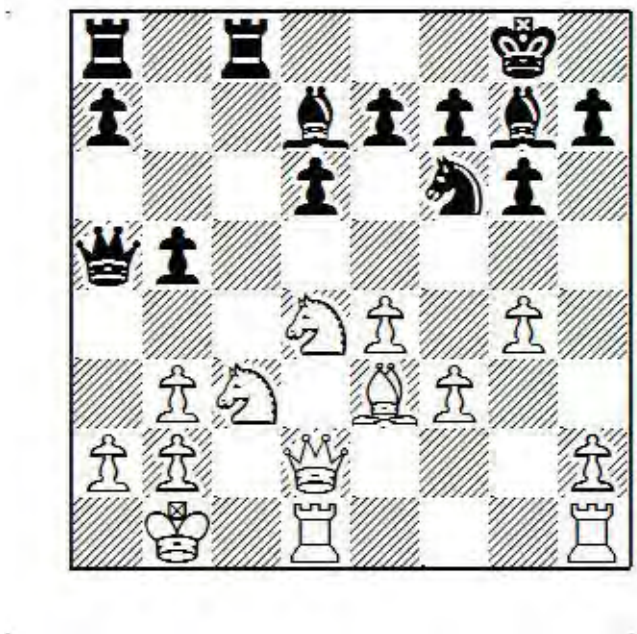
The main alternative is of course the other bishop retreat, to the 'normal' square, 11 Bb3 and after 11 ... Nxb3+ (11 ... Rb8 transposes to the Chinese Dragon, which we examined in the previous chapter) 12 cxb3 (12 Nxb3 a5 13 h4 b5 14 h5 a4 leaves Black with the far more dangerous attack, P.Danzanvilliers-S.Belkhodja, Chartres 1990), Black has:

a) 12 ... Qb8 13 Bh6 Bxh6 14 Qxh6 b5 15 h4 b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 exd5, A.Zontakh-D.Velimirovic, Arandjelovac 1993, and now 17 ... Rc8+ 18 Kb1 Rc5 19 h5 Qf8 20 Qg5 h6 21 Qe3 g5 would be quite interesting to play. Black should be at least equal here.

b) 12 ... a5 13 a4 Qc8 14 Kb1 Rd8 15 g4 e5 16 Ndb5 d5 17 g5 d4 18 gxf6 dxe3 19 Qxe3 Bxb5 20 Nxb5 Bxf6 21 Rc1 Qh3 22 Nc7 was played in A.Lastin-K.Chernyshov, Ohrid 2001, and here 22 ... Rac8 23 Nd5 Kg7! would have kept things competitive and complex.

c) 12 ... Rb8 13 Kb1 b5 14 g4 b4 15 Nce2 Qa5 16 h4 Rfc8 17 h5 Rc7 (17 ... Nxe4?! is too optimistic as after 18 fxe4 Qe5 19 hxg6 hxg6 20 Ka1 Qxe4 21 Ng3 Qe5 as in I.Saric-V.Bologan, Poikovsky 2014, White could have pulled the carpet away under Black with 22 Rdg1! Bxg4 23 Rh4 f5 24 Ndxf5 Bxf5 25 Bd4 Rc2 26 Bxe5 Rxd2 27 Bxg7 and White has very good winning chances) 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 g5 Nh5 20 Rc1 Rbc8 21 Rxc7 Rxc7 22 Nc2 Rb7 with at best a tiny edge for White, A.Motylev-Bu Xiangzhi, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007.

d) 12 ... Qa5 leads to positions not unlike those we looked at in the game Grischuk-Nakamura earlier in this chapter. After 13 Kb1 Rfc8 14 g4, Black has the pawn sacrifice 14 ... b5.



Here we reach another fork in the road:

d1) 15 Ncxb5 Qxd2 16 Bxd2 a6 17 Na3 Nxg4 18 fxg4 Bxd4 19 Bg5 Bc5 20 h3 f6 and Black is obviously doing quite well here with superior pawn structure and bishop pair, but nevertheless still managed to lose in B.Socko-Bu Xiangzhi Beijing 2008.

d2) 15 Bh6?! Bxh6 16 Qxh6 b4 17 Nce2 Qe5!? (centralising the queen and making room for the a-pawn to barge forward) 18 Ng3 a5 19 Rhg1 a4 20 bxa4?! (20 f4 Nxg4 21 fxe5 Nxh6 22 exd6 axb3 23 Nxb3 exd6 24 Rxd6 Bb5 is a better option for White, even if Black's chances are preferable here too) 20 ... Rxa4 21 Ngf5? Nxe4! (Black parries White's threat and starts an unstoppable counterattack) 22 Qe3 gxf5?! (Black has a forced win with the beautiful 22 ... Bxf5! 23 Nxf5 Rxa2 24 Kxa2 Qe6+ 25 Kb1 Nc3+ 26 bxc3 Qb3+ 27 Kc1 bxc3! and it is over for White) 23 gxf5+ Ng3 24 Rxg3+ Kh8 25 Qg5 Ra5 26 Qd2?? (a total meltdown as 26 Rg4 b3 27 axb3 Qxf5+ 28 Nxf5 Bxf5+ 29 Qxf5 Rxf5 leaves Black with no more than a symbolic endgame advantage) 26 ... Bxf5+ 27 Ka1 Rxa2+! 28 Kxa2 Qd5+ and facing mate in two, White resigned in M.Annaberdiev-Bu Xiangzhi, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

d3) 15 h4 b4 16 Nce2 Rc7 17 Nc2 Rb8 18 h5 Rc6?! (Black has a strong knight sacrifice in the following lines: 18 ... Nxg4!? hxg6 Rxc2 20 gxh7+ Kh8 21 Kxc2 Qxa2 22 Bd4 Rc8+ 23 Nc3 e5 24 Ra1 Qxa1 25 Rxa1 exd4 26 Rg1 Ne3+ 27 Kb1 bxc3 with an unclear position and 18 ... Nxe4! 19 fxe4 Bc6! 20

hxg6 Bxe4 21 gxf7+ Kxf7 22 Rc1 Rbc8 23 Ned4 Bxd4 24 Qxd4 Bxh1 25 Rxh1 Rxc2 and Black should be better despite his very open king) 19 a3 Rxc2 20 Qxc2 bxa3 21 Bd4 axb2 22 Bxb2 Rc8 23 Qd3 Rb8 24 hxg6 hxg6 25 Nc1 Be6 26 Rh2 Qb4, and Black has reasonably good compensation for exchange, G.Gopal-Bu Xiangzhi, Beijing 2008.

11 ... Rc8 12 Kb1 a6?!

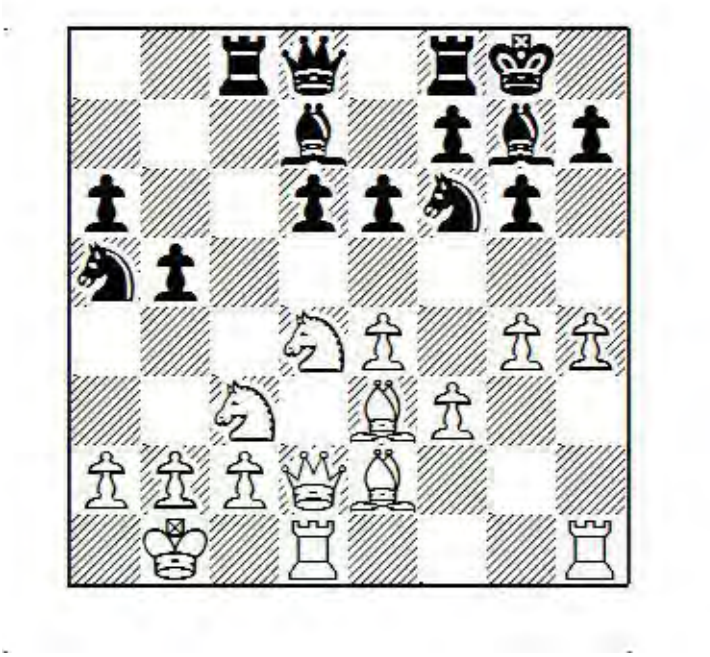
Question: This looks slow, does Black really have time for this?

Answer: With Black already having spent time on ... Bd7 and ... Rc8, this move is therefore not ideal. Black should have pulled the brake at this point and entered the normal lines with 12 ... Nc4 13 Bxc4 Rxc4.

13 g4

White has also tried 13 Nb3 (13 h4 h5 is probably still playable for Black) but this should not represent any kind of threat to Black. After 13 ... Nxb3 14 cxb3 b5 15 Bd4, M.Karthikeyan-Y.Kuzubov, Abu Dhabi 2014, Black could try 15 ... Bc6 16 h4 h5 with a pretty comfortable game.

13 ... b5 14 h4 e6



This may appear strange, softening the d6-pawn, but Black is angling for ... b5-b4 and needs to take the d5-square away from White. The other choices are less palatable:

a) 14 ... Nc4 15 Bxc4 Rxc4 16 h5 is slow and unconvincing for Black.

b) 14 ... b4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 exd5 looks hazardous for Black as the white kingside attack will tumble over Black like a ton of bricks.

15 a3!

Immediately killing all of Black's ... b5-b4 dreams.

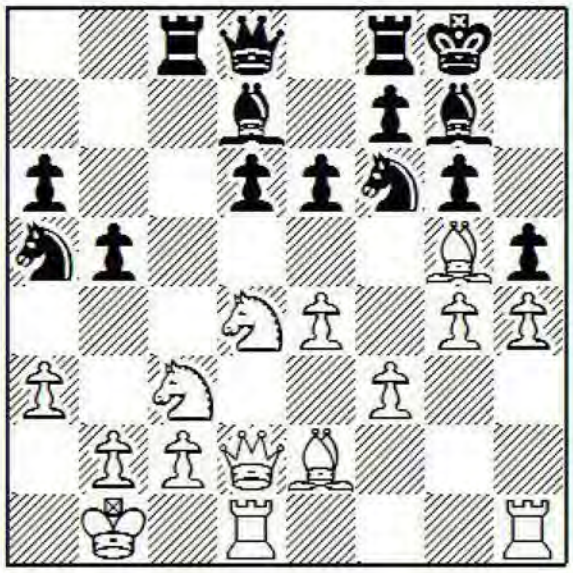
15 ... h5

The lesser of Black's evils as Black cannot allow White to get h4-h5 in:

a) If Black instead played 15 ... Nc4, then 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 Nb3! would expose the issue regarding the soft d6-pawn.

b) Marginally more promising is 15 ... e5 but it eventually also falls short after 16 Nb3 Nxb3 (or 16 ... Nc4 17 Bxc4 bxc4 18 Nc1 Rc6 19 N1a2! a5 20 h5 with a clear advantage for White – A.Schulz) 17 cxb3 Be6 18 Qxd6 Ra8 19 Qxd8 Rfxd8 20 Rxd8+ Rxd8 21 Rd1 Rxd1+ 22 Bxd1 and White is pawn up, although it will require good technique to realise that advantage.

16 Bg5



Pinning the knight and threatening 17 gxh5.

Instead, 16 g5!? Ne8 17 f4 Nc4 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 Rhf1 is possibly better, but not necessarily terrifying for Black.

16 ... hxg4?

Black mistakenly thinks this is forced, but he should have let his usual Dragon creativity run loose. Black's best is 16 ... Qb6! and after 17 Bxf6?! (17 Be3!? Qb7 looks like a fun battle is about to unfold) 17 ... Bxf6 18 gxh5, he ignores the kingside and starts his counterattack against White's king with 18 ... Nc4! 19 Bxc4 bxc4 20 hxg6 Rb8 (forcing White to push the b-pawn forward) 21 b4 cxb3 22 Nxb3 Qc5! 23 Qh6 fxg6 24 Qxg6+ Bg7 25 Rd3 Be8 26 Qg3 Kh8 and Black has more than enough compensation for the pawns. In fact, White will be lucky to stay alive.

17 h5!

Now White's attack hammers through Black's defensive lines.

17 ... gxh5

Now everything sucks for Black. For example, 17 ... Qb6 (17 ... gxf3? is met with the amazing 18 h6! fxe2 19 Qxe2 Rc5 20 Nd5 exd5 21 hxg7 Kxg7 22 Qh2 and it is all over for Black) 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 Qh6 Kf7 21 Qh7+ Ke8 22 Qxg6+ Kd8 23 e5 Bxe5 24 Nxe6+ Bxe6 25 Qxe6 Re8 26 Rh8! Rxh8 27 Qxe5 and White is winning.

18 Rxh5!?

White has other strong options too:

a) 18 fxg4 Rxc3! (if 18 ... hxg4? then 19 Bh6! kills Black on the spot) 19 Bxf6 Rxc2 20 Qxc2 Qxf6 21 gxh5 Rc8 and even though White should be better, then Black at least has some measure of counterplay.

b) 18 Bh6! Ne8 19 Bxg7 Nxg7 20 fxg4 also looks decidedly unhealthy for Black.

18 ... Rc5

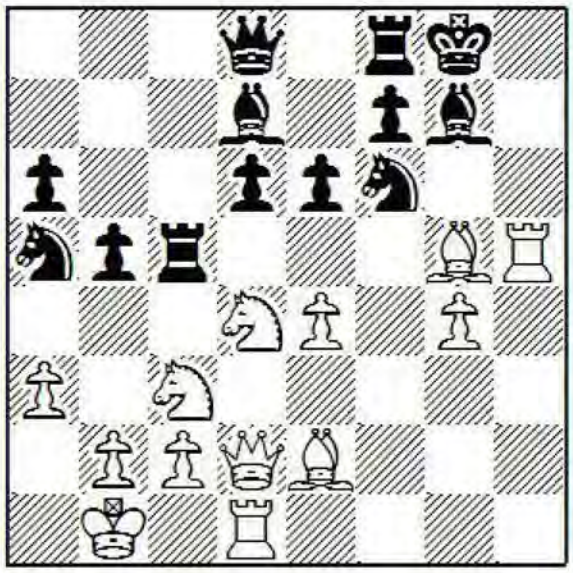
In bad positions, there are usually no good moves. The alternatives do not offer Black any hope either:

a) 18 ... g3 19 Rh3! (intending Rxg3 and doubling on the g-file) is winning for White.

b) 18 ... e5 19 Nd5! and Black can resign.

c) Finally, 18 ... gxf3 19 Nxf3 Rxc3 20 Bxf6 Qxf6 21 bxc3! Bc6 22 e5! dxe5 23 Nxe5 and White will pile up on the g-file, rapidly ending the fun for Black.

19 fxg4!



Simple and good. As Anand mentions in this annotations to the game, besides making ideas such as Nf5 possible, it also prevents Black from playing ... g4-g3, which can be annoying. Also perfectly good, and maybe even winning, is 19 b4!? Nc4 20 Bxc4 Rxc4 21 Rhh1! Re8 22 Rdg1! and I'm not sure if the black king can escape alive.

19 ... Rxc3 20 Bxf6!

Black was hoping for 20 Qxc3 Nxe4, but this too is pretty awful for Black. After 21 Qe3 Nxg5 22 Rxg5 Qf6 23 Rh1 Re8 24 Rf1 Qh6 25 Qf3 f6 26 Rh5 Qg6 27 Bd3, things have gone for bad to worse.

20 ... Qxf6

There is no way out:

a) 20 ... Rxc2?? loses instantly to 21 Rh8+! with mate in two moves.

b) 20 ... Bxf6 21 Qh6 Re8 22 bxc3 Qe7 23 Nf5! exf5 24 gxf5 and Black cannot avoid mate.

21 Qxc3 Nc4

Desperation on Black's part. Without any good way of drumming up counterplay, he tries for confusion. Obviously Anand is a little too strong for that to work against him.

Moreover, 21 ... Nc6 also does not work as after 22 Nxc6 Bxc6 23 e5! Qf2 24 Qd3, it is goodnight to Black.

22 Bxc4 bxc4 23 Qxc4 Rc8

Also futile is 23 ... Qg6 24 Qxa6 Qxg4 25 Rhh1 Qxe4 26 Qxd6 and it is soon over.

24 Qxa6!

It would have been perfectly okay for Black to resign here.

24 ... Qe7

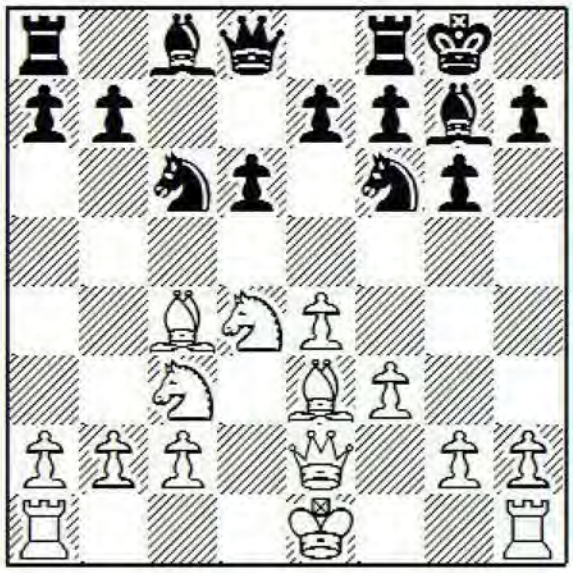
Black cannot avoid getting mated after 24 ... Qf2 25 Qxd6! Bxd4 26 Qxd4 Qxc2+ 27 Ka1.

25 Rh3 Bf6 26 Rb3 Be5 27 Nf3 Bf4 28 Rb4 d5 29 exd5 Qc5 30 c3 1-0

With the last trick averted, Black decided he had enough.

Game 80
J.Hector-J.Aagaard
Copenhagen 2002

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 g6 6 Be3 Bg7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Bc4 0-0 9 Qe2!?



This line has been called the Nordic Variation and that seems entirely fitting due to the efforts of Icelandic grandmaster Jon Arnason and Swedish grandmaster Jonny Hector. It is largely harmless, that is, provided Black knows what he is doing. But even so, many players, who have been prepared to play against this line against Hector, still ended up having to defend an inferior position against the Swede. The point behind putting the queen on e2 instead of the usual d2-square is that after 9 ... Ne5 10 Bb3 Bd7 11 0-0-0 Rc8, Black does not have access to playing the standard ... Nc4. It opens for some other possibilities for Black in terms of potential exchange sacrifices on c3. However, Black does best to stay clear of those lines and adopt a different set-up altogether, not unlike some of the lines we have just discussed in the notes to Anand-Georgiev.

9 ... Na5!

This has been established as the best way to meet White's set-up. Now if the bishop retreats to b3, Black can exchange it and the white queen will prove to be somewhat misplaced on e2.

10 Bd3

For the above-mentioned reasons, White has to retreat the bishop to d3, giving the white set-up a somewhat artificial feel.

10 ... a6

Alternatively, 10 ... e5 11 Nb3 Be6 (11 ... d5 is considered premature and after 12 exd5 Nxd5 13 Nxd5 Qxd5, V.Anand-G.Kamsky, Buenos Aires 1994, the centralising 14 Be4 Qd8 15 0-0 Nc6 16 c3 promises White an edge) 12 0-0 a6 13 Rfd1 b5 14 Qf2 Rb8 15 Ba7 Rb7 16 Bf1 Qc7 17 Nxa5 Rxa7 18 Rxd6 Raa8 19 Qb6 Qxb6+ 20 Rxb6 was played in J.Hector-G.Vescovi, Malmo 1995, and here 20 ... Rfc8 21 Rc6 Bf8 gives Black adequate compensation for the pawn, thanks to his pair of bishops.

11 0-0

Question: Now that White has to castle kingside, is that a failure of his opening strategy?

Answer: It could seem so, but you have to adjust to what is happening on the board. Now the best for White is to send the king to kingside.

White of course has tried directing the king in the opposite direction, but without much success. After 11 0-0-0 b5 12 g4 e5 (12 ... b4 is also very promising) 13 Nb3 Be6 14 h4 Rc8 15 Kb1 Rxc3!? (not strictly necessary, but of course why would Black not want to play this move if it is available?) 16 bxc3 Nc4 17 Bc1 h5 18 Bg5 hxg4 19 h5?! (19 Rdg1!? is better) 19 ... Nxe4 20 Bxe4 (20 Qxe4 is probably better, but Black will still call the shots after 20 ... Qxg5 21 hxg6 d5 22 gxf7+ Kxf7 23 Qe2 g3 and only Black can be better) 20 ... Qxg5 21 hxg6 f5, Black has massive compensation for the exchange, J.Sylvan-

C.Ward, Copenhagen 1997.

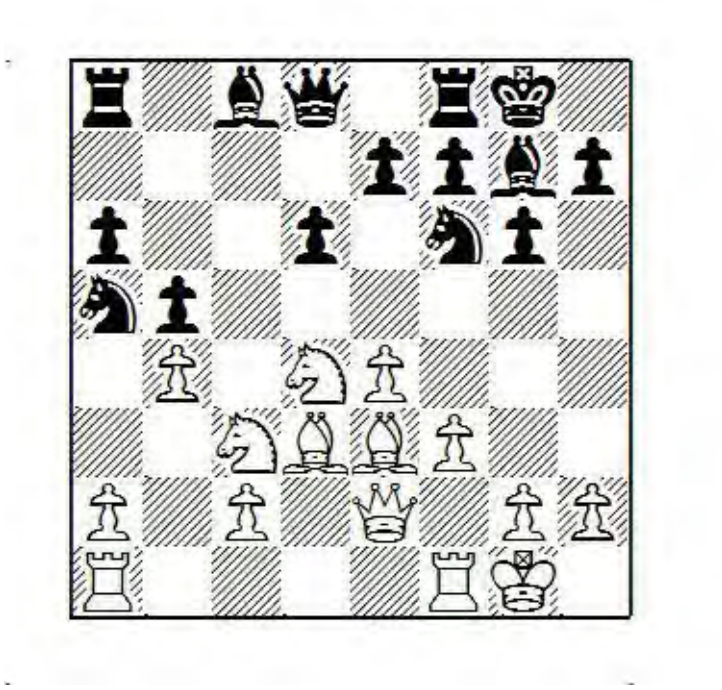
11 ... b5

Angling to gain control over the c4-square and then later put the knight there. Another equally good option is 11 ... Bd7 12 Qf2 (or 12 Rad1 Rc8 13 Qf2 Nc4 14 Bc1 b5 15 Rfe1 Qb6 16 Bf1 e6 17 h3 b4 18 Nb1, J.Hector-P.Zelbel, Nuremberg 2012, and now both 18 ... d5 and 18 ... e5 look like good options for Black) 12 ... Qc8 13 Rae1 Nc4 14 Bc1 Qc5 15 Kh1 Rac8 16 Nb3 Qxf2 17 Rxf2 b5 and Black has a very comfortable position, J.Hector-C.Ward, Copenhagen 1998.

12 Rad1

Centralising the rook. The two leading experts have each tried something else here as well:

a) 12 b4!? is surprising and possibly also quite good. It surprises me that this move hasn't been repeated.



Question: Hang on ... isn't this anti-positional? Doesn't White weaken himself on the c-file as well as make the g7-bishop even stronger now?

Answer: White cannot take advantage of those above-mentioned positional concessions. White's minor pieces and queen are well placed for queenside activity and already, White is ready to play a2-a4 to increase the pressure in that sector.

After 12 ... e5 13 Nb3 Nxb3 14 cxb3 Be6 15 a4 bxa4 (15 ... Rc8 16 Rac1 d5 is possibly Black's best try to equalise) 16 bxa4 Rc8, J.Arnason-W.Watson, Brighton 1982, here 17 Rac1!? a5 18 b5 d5 19 Nxd5 Bxd5 20 Rxc8 Qxc8 21 exd5 Nxd5 22 Bf2 promises White a steady advantage, thanks to the protected passed b-pawn.

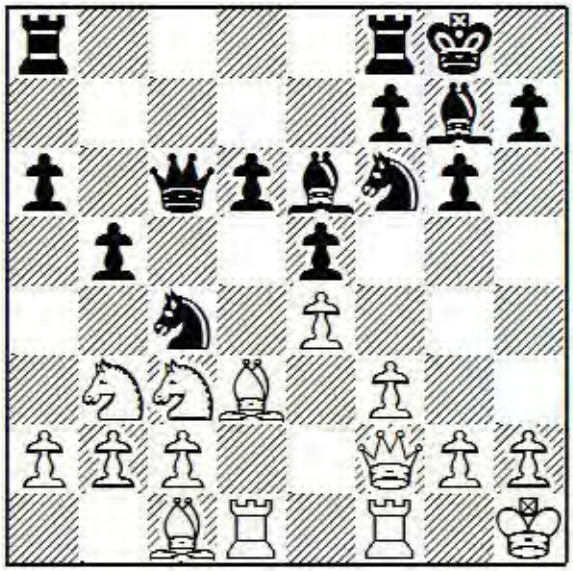
b) 12 Nb3 looks more insipid as after 12 ... Be6 13 Nxa5 Qxa5 14 Qf2 Qc7 15 Bb6 Qc6 16 Bd4 b4 17 Ne2 Bc4 18 Rac1 Rfc8 19 Bxc4 Qxc4, Black has equalised effortlessly, J.Hector-N.De Firmian, Copenhagen 2002.

12 ... e5

Question: This looks like a mistake as Black blocks his Dragon bishop and creates a backward pawn on an open file. That surely cannot be right?

Answer: It would be wrong if Black got nothing in return. Here, however, Black pushes White's knight to a less active square and he gains space to develop his pieces more actively. Finally, the backward pawn is only weak if it can get attacked, that is unlikely to happen here.

13 Nb3 Be6 14 Qf2 Nc4 15 Bc1 Qc7 16 Kh1 Qc6



Black takes his time to improve his position and increase control over the d5-square. Alternatively, 16 ... Rfd8 17 Rfe1 Rac8 also looks very pleasant for Black.

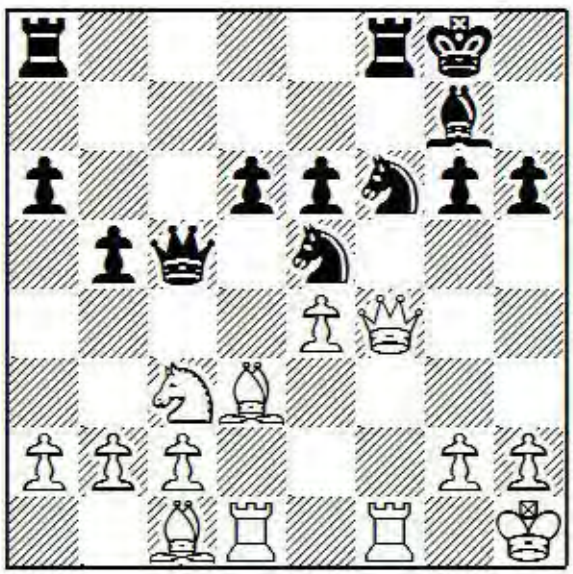
17 Qh4 h6!?

Denying White the possibility of Bg5 at a later stage. Right now, the h6-pawn cannot be taken because the b2-pawn will fall in return and with it, the entire queenside is likely to collapse.

18 f4

White has to shake things up if he does not want to be strangled slowly, boa constrictor style.

18 ... exf4 19 Nd4 Qc5 20 Nxe6 fxe6 21 Qxf4 Ne5



Question: With the bishop pair and all of Black's pawns loose, White should better right?

Answer: It seems as if White has successful in his shaking up scheme. The nature of the position certainly has changed as Black's pawn structure looks a bit fluffier and White has the bishop pair. In reality, Black's advantage has actually gotten bigger as the bishop pair is virtually useless and Black's pawns cannot be attacked easily. Moreover, those pawns cover the important squares.

22 Qg3 g5?!

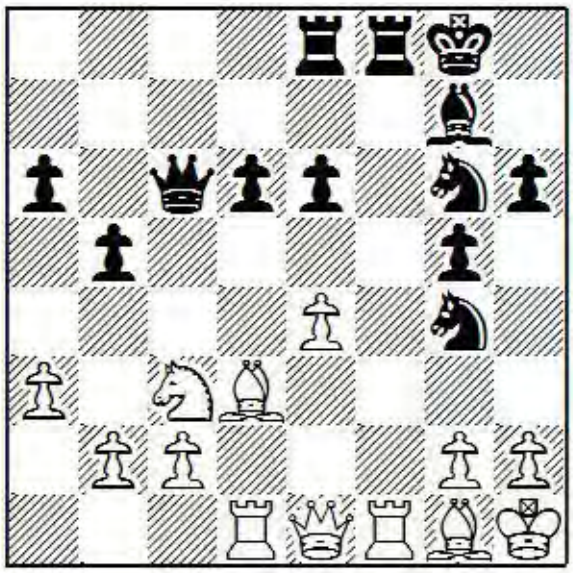
Black is really aiming to strangle White, but this may be taking things a bit too far and a little too soon. Instead, 22 ... Nfg4!? looks promising and threatens ... Nf2+ for starters. After 23 Bf4 g5 24 Bxe5 Nxe5,

White's position becomes even more depressing to look at.

23 Be3 Qc6 24 a3 Rae8

White's position is pretty miserable as there are no good active plans. So he resorts to start shuffling his pieces around, hoping for Black to loosen the grip.

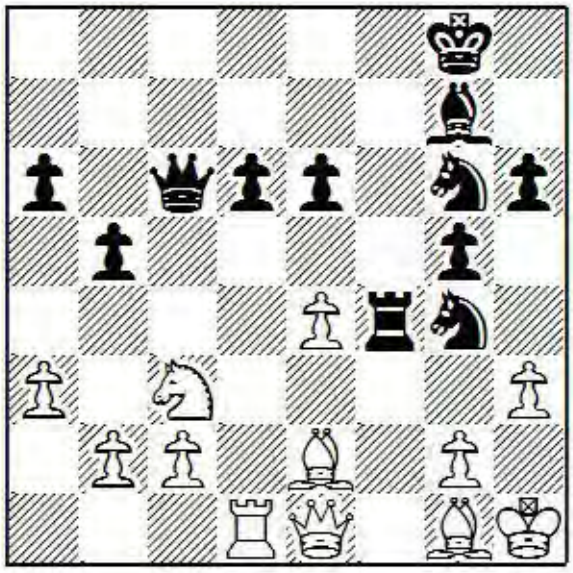
25 Qe1 Nfg4 26 Bg1 Ng6?!



27 Rxf8+?

It looks like White is getting dejected with his dwindling chances. I'm quite surprised that here, the tactically gifted Swede missed the opportunity to change the nature of the game with 27 Nxb5!? axb5 28 Qe2 N4e5 29 Bxb5 Qb7 30 Bxe8 Rxe8, which is possibly still better for Black, but the course of the game has been rocked dramatically.

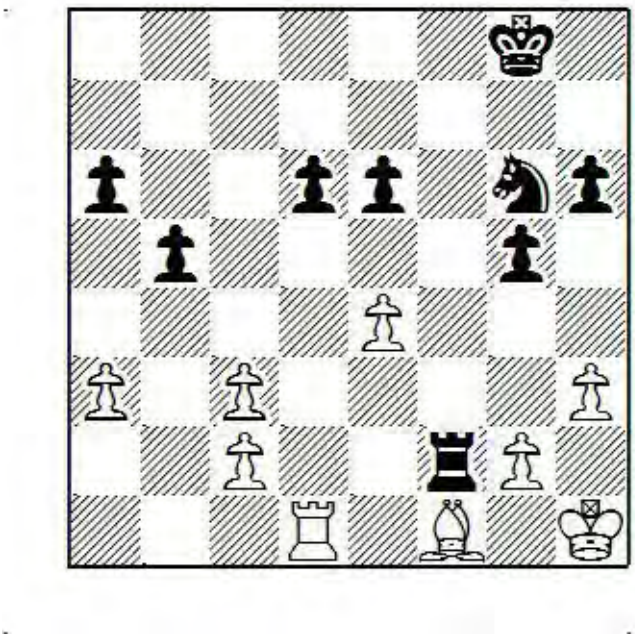
27 ... Rxf8 28 Be2 Rf4 29 h3



29 ... Bxc3!

Even though Black is giving up his Dragon bishop, this is the right decision, messing up White's pawns further.

30 Qxc3 Qxc3 31 bxc3 Nf2+ 32 Bxf2 Rxf2 33 Bf1



33 ... g4!

No respite for White. Aagaard presses on relentlessly and Hector soon erred.

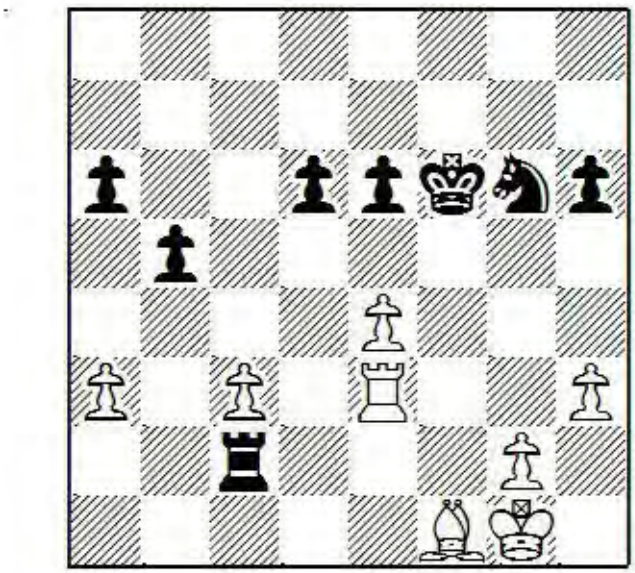
34 Kg1

White's pawn structure after 34 hxg4 is a horror show, but that was likely White's best chance to hold out as after 34 ... Ne5 35 Kg1 Rxc2 36 Rxd6 Kf7 37 Rxa6 Nxg4 38 Rd6 Rc1 39 Rd3 Ke7, while Black definitely has the better chances, White is still playing.

34 ... g3 35 Rd3?

White perhaps decided that Black's g-pawn is a bigger problem than the lack of activity. Instead, he should have given preference to 35 Rxd6 Nf4 36 e5 (36 Rxa6?? Rxc2 37 Rd6 Rc1 38 Rd2 Kg7 and White will soon run out of moves, being completely tied up on the back rank) 36 ... h5 37 a4 Nd5 38 axb5 Ne3 39 Bd3 Rxg2+ 40 Kh1 axb5 and even though Black is undoubtedly better, there still accuracy required to convert the advantage. In the stem game, things are a lot simpler.

35 ... Rxc2 36 Rxg3 Kf7 37 Re3 Kf6



White's pieces have been undeniably dominated and he is unlikely to survive this endgame.

38 g3 Ne5 39 h4 Ra2 40 Be2 Rxa3

With Black completely winning in this position, I will refrain from commenting on the rest of the game, even if there are some inaccuracies. The then-international master from Denmark (later grandmaster as well as a world renowned trainer) managed to convert the advantage.

41 Kf2 Ra2 42 Ke1 Ra1+ 43 Kd2 Rg1 44 Kc2 Rg2 45 Kd1 Nc4 46 Bxc4 bxc4 47 e5+ dxe5 48 Re4 Rxg3 49 Rxc4 Kf5 50 Kc2 Rg2+ 51 Kd3 e4+ 52 Ke3 Rg3+ 53 Kf2 Rh3 54 Rc6 a5 55 Ra6 Rxc3 56 Rxa5+ Kf4 57 Ra6 Rc2+ 58 Ke1 Rh2 59 Rxe6 h5 60 Kf1 Rxh4 61 Kg2 Ke3 62 Ra6 Rg4+ 63 Kf1 Rf4+ 64 Ke1 Kf3 65 Ra3+ e3 66 Ra8 h4 67 Re8 h3 68 Rh8 Kg3 69 Ke2 h2 70 Kxe3 Rg4 0-1

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Cuartas.J-Grigoryan.K, Barcelona 2014
Czebe.A-Kislik.E, Budapest 2009
Damljanovic.B-Georgiev.Ki, Karadjordje 2004
De Firmian.N-Ernst.T, Stockholm 2002
Dervishi.E-Cebalo.M, Bratto 2003
Dominguez Perez.L-Carlsen.M, Linares 2009
Dominguez Perez.L-Smerdon.D, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009
Firman.N-Svane.R, German League, Hamburg 2014
Gabrielian.A-Bu Xiangzhi, Moscow 2012
Ganguly.S-Konguvel.P, Dresden 2012
Ganguly.S-Narayanan.S, Moscow 2013
Georgiev.Kr-Komljenovic.D, Biel 1989
Grigore.N-Golubev.M, Bucharest 2003
Grischuk.A-Nakamura.H, London 2012
Gruenfeld.Y-Hansen.Cu, Jerusalem 1986
Hansen.Cu-Roder.P, Copenhagen 2006
Hector.J-Aagaard.J, Copenhagen 2002
Hector.J-Grandelius.N, Swedish Championships, Falun 2012
Ivanchuk.V-Gashimov.V, Moscow (blitz) 2009
Ivanchuk.V-Topalov.V, Belgrade 1995
Kamsky.G-Nakamura.H, Wijk aan Zee 2012
Kindbeiter.F-Cullen.P, Correspondence 2004
Kinkelin.C-Tay.J, Correspondence 1999
Kokarev.D-Carlsson.P, Oropesa del Mar 2000
Korneev.O-Hernandez Onna.R, Mondariz 2000
Kovalev.A-Hansen.Ca, Gausdal 1990
Kudrin.S-Gurevich.D, US Championships, Saint Louis 2010
Kuijf.M-Rechlis.G, Beersheba 1987
Kurmann.O-Guseinov.G, Aix-les-Bains 2011
Luther.T-Polzin.R, Austrian League 2009
Manca.F-Cebalo.M, Saint Vincent 2004
Milenkovic.M-Mladenovic.S, Serbian Team Championship, Kraljevo 2014

Mokrys.C-Rubinas.P, Correspondence 2011
Morozevich.A-Ivanchuk.V, Russian Team Championships, Dagomys 2008
Munguntuul.B-Li Chao, Caleta 2014
Najer.E-Mista.A, German League 2010
Negi.P-Grigoryan.K, Dubai 2012
Nepomniachtchi.I-Nakamura.H, Moscow 2011
Nijboer.F-David.A, Wijk aan Zee 1997
Nikolov.Y-Tkaczyk.P, Correspondence 2001
Nisipeanu.L-Carlsen.M, Foros 2008
Nisipeanu.L-Carlsen.M, Medias 2010
Nisipeanu.L-Radjabov.T, Bazna 2009
Nunn.J-Khalifman.A, Wijk aan Zee 1991
Nunn.J-Ljubojevic.L, Amsterdam 1988
Ortiz Suarez.I-Obregon Rivero.J, Pamplona 2012
Paetzold.O-Evans.G, Correspondence 2007
Perelshteyn.E-Shahade.G, New York 2001
Petrov.M-Nielsen.P.H, Helsinore 2011
Pokorna.R-Gelashvili.T, Thessaloniki 2007
Polgar.J-Jones.G, London (rapid) 2013
Polgar.J-Kaidanov.G, Hilton Head 2010
Ponomariov.R-Radjabov.T, Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010
Radjabov.T-Carlsen.M, Baku 2008
Renet.O-Kudrin.S, St Martin 1991
Shirov.A-Topalov.V, Madrid 1996
Short.N-Motylev.A, Wijk aan Zee 2009
Shytaj.L-Georgiev.Ki, Italian Team Ch, Spoleto 2011
So.W-Li Chao, Manila 2007
Svetushkin.D-Milu.R, Bucharest 1999
Svidler.P-Carlsen.M, Nice (blindfold) 2010
Szabo.K-Perunovic.M, Sarajevo 2011
Szabo.K-Skytte.R, Budapest 2014
Ter Sahakyan.S-Gharamian.T, Cappelle la Grande 2013
Tesic.Z-Standke.W, Correspondence 2012
Thorhallsson.T-Jones.G, Reykjavik 2013
Timman.J-Tiviakov.S, Wijk aan Zee 2001
Topalov.V-Carlsen.M, Bilbao 2008
Volokitin.A-Tiviakov.S, Russian Team Championships, Sochi 2007
Zhao Jun-Ma Qun, Ho Chi Minh City 2012
Zugic.I-Nakamura.H, Miami 2007